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SYLVIA OF SARAWAK



Lewis Prothero

SYLVIA OF SARAWAK

As she is to-day.

SYLVIA OF SARAWAK

An Autobiography

by

H.H. THE RANEE OF SARAWAK

With 48 Illustrations

SECOND IMPRESSION

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I dedicate this book to my Husband—
the man who has been my greatest
friend—the man who has never let
me down—and the man who has made
me laugh more than anyone I know.

My very great thanks are due to Mr. J. A. Smith, of the Sarawak Government Offices, for his kind and untiring efforts in re-kindling memories and recalling dates.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD	II

PART I

CHILDHOOD	13
-----------	----

PART II

ADOLESCENCE	64
-------------	----

PART III

MARRIAGE	118
----------	-----

PART IV

MIDDLE AGE	167
------------	-----

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

SYLVIA OF SARAWAK	<i>Frontispiece</i>
MY FIRST FRIEND—W. T. STEAD	VALING PAGE 16
MY GRANDFATHER AND I	17
MYSELF AGED SIX	17
"MY LITERARY CAREER"	92
MY WEDDING	92
THE "GREY FRIARS" ORCHESTRA	93
FISHING IN SCOTLAND	110
RIDING IN THE NEW FOREST	110
FIELD-MARSHAL THE EARL OF YPRES	111
MY MOTHER	114
MY FATHER	114
MY BEDROOM WINDOW AT ORCHARD LEA	115
ORCHARD LEA GARDEN	115
MY MOTHER-IN-LAW	146
MY FATHER-IN-LAW	146
THE ASTANA, SARAWAK	147
THE "GULA GULA" MAN AT PORT SAID	168
A KYAN LADY	169
A DYAK WARRIOR	176
A DYAK LADY	176
DYAK WARRIORS	176
A MALAY GIRL	177
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW	192
SYLVIA OF SARAWAK	193
LEONORA, VALERIE AND ELIZABETH	208

	FACING PAGE
RAJAH	209
RANEE	209
THE ASTANA FROM THE AIR	226
ANCIENT TROPHIES HANGING IN BARAM FORT	227
KOH. A DYAK CHIEF CARRYING HEAD TROPHIES	227
ACCESSION OF THE RAJAH AND RANEE OF SARAWAK, WITH THE TUAN MUDA IN THE BACKGROUND	232
COUNCIL NEGRI DAY	233
SARAWAK RANGERS	233
GIVING MR. GEORGE ARLISS THE SARAWAK "BIRD"	254
MR. JACK BUCHANAN	255
H.H. KING GEORGE OF GREECE	256
VYNER AND MYSELF	257
THE COUNTESS OF INCHCAPE AND SIMON	260
THE EARL OF INCHCAPE	260
VALERIE	261
MY SON-IN-LAW, HARRY ROY	276
ELIZABETH (MRS. HARRY ROY)	276
MR. AND MRS. HARRY ROY MEETING ME AT CROYDON AFTER MY "FLIGHT" FROM SARAWAK	277

FOREWORD

THIS is not an ordinary biography. Indeed, I never intended that it should be. Facts to my mind are insufferable, and dates fill me with fear.

Dating an incident or a person is like exposing the blemish in a fruit, or destroying the petals of a flower. Besides, I never could remember dates or the names of things and places. I can only remember incidents and people and the way they have moved and spoken to me through these fifty and more years. Remember them and live with them, so that what has passed merges easily and smoothly into the happiness of to-day. Memory is like a will-o'-the-wisp. You see the light of it ahead of you—you move towards it and try to grasp it, and away it goes again into the shadows ; but the senses remain—the sense of a sound, a touch, a smell. A melody brings back with it the ghosts and shadows of a dancing adventure that has gone. The touch of smooth oak, or cedar wood, or silk will bring back an old home or a nursery or a room that has been loved. The smell of flowers, or of perfume, the aromatic glory of the East—those are the things that linger, that fill one's old age and make it young again. Why, therefore, drag dreams down to earth? Why index them and date them, and reduce them to a printed line of facts? Why regard them with a cold, unbiassed eye, and unroll the velvet mystery of them into so many yards of encyclopædic facts? Some may look upon this book as frivolous. Some may say that I have skimmed too lightly along the lines of time—but what I have tried to do is to convey a picture, a pen picture, of all the people I have met and the things that I have done. I myself am not of sufficient importance to dwell too heavily on what has passed. My husband and I have lived in the world, but not with it—but we have lived, lived gloriously and happily, and without regret; balancing evenly between England and the East.

If I have been in any way in error, if I have exaggerated or overstated the conditions as I knew them, then I must apologize and beg that you will put down my indiscretions as either ignorance or the inability to form into words a life that has been such fun.

SYLVIA OF SARAWAK

PART I

CHILDHOOD

I WAS born in No. 1 Tilney Street at five-ten a.m. on February 25th, 1885. There was nothing momentous about my arrival into the world beyond the fact that I weighed only five pounds, which must have been an intense relief to the little mother who had already at the age of nineteen produced a boy of over ten pounds. By the time she was twenty-two she had the burden of two boys and two girls upon her young and inexperienced shoulders. Not a bad accomplishment for one who was but freshly from the schoolroom.

The first thing I can remember clearly about my childhood is a nurse we had and the deep hatred I felt in my soul for her. She was short and ample-figured, and unrelentingly severe. She used to beat us with little sticks with dogs' heads on the handles of them, and the degree of our naughtiness was made known to us by the breed of dog she made use of. For instance, for slight offences we were beaten with a pug. When our naughtiness increased a terrier was used; but when we had been outstandingly wicked and disobedient she belaboured our backs with the pointed nose of a greyhound, with the result that whenever I meet one of these mild and gentle creatures, I cannot help feeling an uncomfortable quiver down my spine.

That is really all I can remember about Mrs. Jukes, except that she would chase my mother out of the nursery every time she ventured into it, and she would lock us up in a

black cupboard amongst her clothes that smelled of rotten apples.

When she left us we had a gentle, red-haired woman we all loved called Mrs. Clark, and she remained with us until we had reached the age for governesses. Then the difficulties began. I often wonder how my poor mother put up with it. My sister Dorothy, or Doll as she was known, simply would not tolerate a governess. She refused to learn anything, and smacked their faces if they dared as much as uplift their voices in remonstrance. So, as you can imagine, there was a long line of succeeding governesses of all nationalities, blondes, brunettes, grey heads, even a tutor at one time was considered, but my parents realized more trouble might arise by this, and gave up the idea of having anyone at all.

My mother endeavoured to teach us herself for a while, and she would give us long lists of spelling to learn by heart, and the capitals of countries. I was terror-stricken by these lists, for I was quite incapable of learning anything, and still remain incapable to this day. Doll, of course, was superior and confident—she had a quick and eager brain and a retentive memory. How I envied her her capacity for repeating her lessons without a single fault. Every morning we would go into my mother's room while she was dressing; an hour later I would retire in tears. But in the end I thought out a way of escape. I grew cunning and deceptive. How often one is reduced to this by fear. I copied out all the answers and concealed them in a handkerchief screwed up in my hand. My mother had at that time a small and timid maid by the name of Miss Vaughan, without whose help this deceit of mine could never have been enacted. She would spread her slim figure as far as she was able as she brushed my mother's long hair before the mirror, so that I could not be seen reflected in my corner—and there I would sit with my handkerchief in my lap and all my answers laid out before my eyes. I said them stumbly—I even purposely mis-spelt some, and gave out a few wrong capitals. I knew that what I was doing was mean and very wrong, but it was the only way I could go through the morning lessons without tears.

I do not remember seeing much of my father at that time.

We used to be brought down to the drawing-room for an hour after tea, very clean and starched and terrified. My sister was lovely, and it was a constant torturing thought to me that she had all the graces I so lacked. Her hair was of a pale gold, her face a small but perfect oval, she had large brown eyes and a soft and lovely mouth. I was dark and sallow and unresponsive; the bridge of my nose ached so much that I always sat with one finger pressed heavily against it to relieve the pain. It has occurred to me since that I must have been suffering from adenoids, only in those days such a complaint had not completely materialized in the medical world, so the ache was obliged to remain in the bridge of my nose, and the dense feeling in my brain until this day.

My father seemed always to be busy, and in that London house my memory of him is sitting at a writing-table surrounded by books and papers, wearing a black velvet coat and smoking an eternal cigarette.

We used to sit on the floor in my mother's room and watch her dress for dinner. There was a clock on the mantelpiece that had a shining halo like diamonds swinging round the face of it, and when the lights were lowered I used to think this glittering clock was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

Sometimes my mother would read aloud to us. She had a thrilling way of making the people in books seem alive and moving in the room. She taught Doll and me to crochet because she could not bear ever to see anyone idle. I remember so well when we were listening to her reading a book called *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins hooking and hooking at a piece of wool, and making her believe how really industrious I was, but, when she came to inspect my work at the end of about two hours, there was no more to look at than the loop she had originally made for me.

My whole life at that time seemed made up of petty deceptions in my frantic endeavour to conceal from my parents how dull and unenlightened I was.

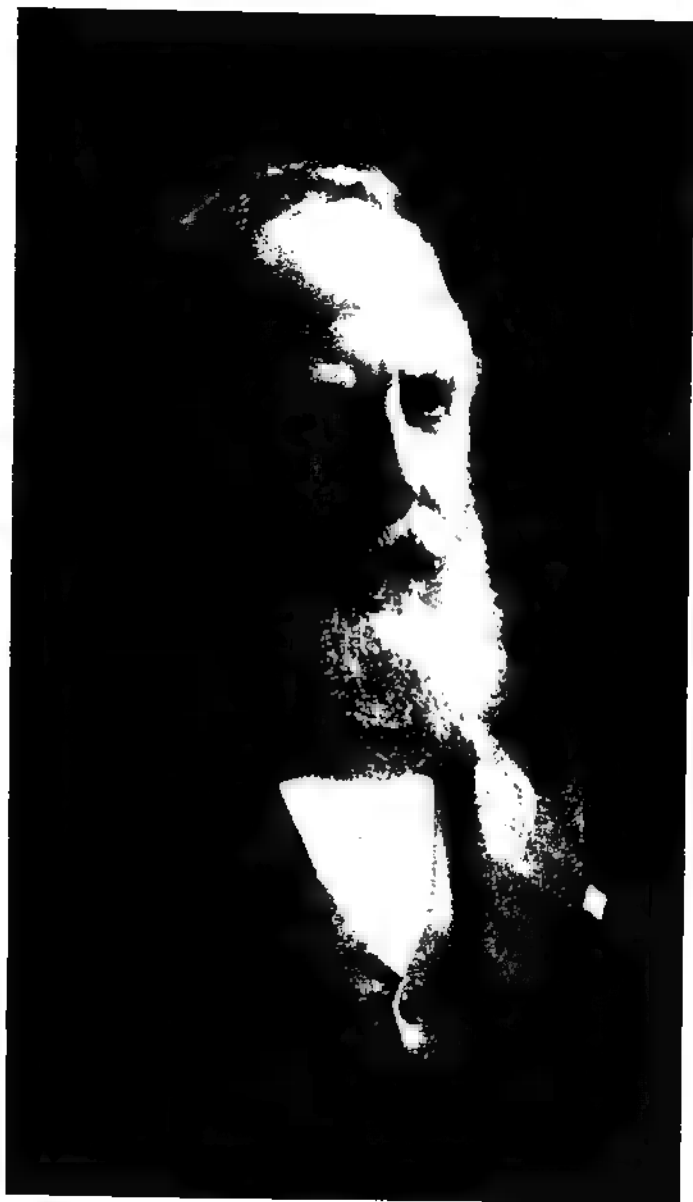
The man I remember most in those early days was W. T. Stead, to my mind one of the most amazing and outstanding

personalities at that time. He must have been outstanding for me to remember him so well. It is this man alone who seems to step out of the background of my life. Indeed, he is so vivid to me still that if I close my eyes and hold out my hand I can almost feel the texture of his crisp beard curling round my fingers. He was always so especially kind to me. His looks might easily have been terrifying to a child, with his unkemptness and his wide and startled blue eyes, but there was a magnetic charm in everything he did—maybe because he was so emphatically sincere. He was a pioneer of modern thought and a revolutionary believer in altering laws that created unnecessary suffering. He had courage and confidence in himself and what he was saying. Up and down he would pace in enormous carpet slippers, and rake the air for spirits and ghosts until they took shape before him, and he saw and spoke to those of the dead that he wished to. But, however immersed he was in conversation, he would never forget the hour that we children went to bed. As the clock struck six, down he would go on all fours, and start growling like a bear. With a shriek of delight I would clamber on to his back and away he would go, still on all fours, up the stairs and along the passage to bed, with me digging my heels into his sides and pinching his shoulders and shouting at the top of my voice: "Get along, you naughty, naughty bear."

I loved Mr. Stead, he seemed somehow to belong specially to me. He called me his little American girl, and he was different to me than he was to the others. Years afterwards I asked him the reason why. "You were such an ugly little devil," he replied, his blue eyes twinkling, "I hadn't the heart to leave you out."

We used often to talk about death and the great hereafter, and he promised me he would come all the way back from wherever he went to when he was dead on purpose to see me. "You will be certain to know me," he would say, "on account of my carpet slippers."

It seems so strange that he who believed so much in spirit walking should never have been able to communicate with me. And, long after he came to his unfortunate and tragic end in the *Titanic*, I used to look out of the window towards the



MY FIRST FRIEND W. T. STEAD



(Above) MY GRANDFATHER AND I
(Below) MYSELF AGED SIX

long green slopes of the garden where he had so often walked, to see if I could see him.

In the summer we used to go into the country. It meant a day of infuriated packing by equally infuriated nurses, and all of us wildly excited and getting in the way. Every time we moved, no matter what time of day it was, I had a raging earache and was obliged to go to bed. I suffered considerably from these earaches, they tortured and upset my childhood. Hot oil was poured into my ear, which seemed to make it worse; the only relief from pain I could get was to lie with my face upon a boiling hot water-bottle, but even then I was unable to sleep.

Orchard Lea was an ideal place for children. It was five miles from Windsor, and four and a half miles from Ascot. Both my father and mother rode in those early days; she had a beautiful mare called Dolly, and when this mare died, she never rode again. My father had an Arab by the name of Blotting Paper who used to rear so high when he mounted that it looked as if they would be certain to fall backwards. I can just remember my father's racing stable and the horses being exercised round and round the meadow on a long white rein by a man called Fred Peters who, as a child, had been a little groom who sat by the side of our coachman Gullwell with highly folded arms. I think they called these little boy grooms "Tigers" in those days. They were very smartly dressed in white leggings and long black boots, and tall hats with immense cockades on the sides of them. Fred Peters remained with us until he was quite an old man, and after him came his son "Alfie," who was my father's chauffeur and all-round handy man.

There was a farm at Orchard Lea, and, of course, the most popular man with us on that farm was George Grout the cowman. Oh, the loveliness of seeing the white milk splashing and foaming into the pails and the joy of drinking a full glass of it while it was still so light and warm.

We used to play at being cows. We used to strip a long

birch branch quite bare except for a little bunch of foliage at the end, and tie it round our waists as a tail. One of us, usually one of the boys, was cowman, but the game would nearly always end in a dispute, because not one of us would volunteer to be milked. We had not really invented a satisfactory method of accomplishing this milking. We could moo and chew cud in excellent imitation of our Jersey herd, but I am afraid ■ cows we were more decorative than useful.

So many unimportant incidents keep filling my mind as I write; unimportant now, but what seemed then monumental stepping-stones to the building of our lives. For instance, my first introduction to real fear, when my mother's two carriage horses, Baby and Bighead by name, got loose and ran wildly into the garden. There is something about the thunder of a horse's hoofs that is so strangely terrifying, and to see these enormous bays galloping across the lawn, through rose beds and across the gravel paths, charging into statues and missing them by a hair's-breadth, filled me with such an unreasoning panic, that, had they taken it into their heads to trample over me, I would not, and could not have attempted to avoid them. Eventually they were caught without harming anyone, but not until the entire staff had turned out and spread themselves like a net across the long green lawns.

When we were at Orchard Lea it was arranged that Doll and I should have dancing lessons at Windsor Castle under the tuition of Mrs. Wordsworth, the famous dancing mistress of those days. Mrs. Wordsworth gave classes once ■ week to Prince Henry of Battenberg and Princess Beatrice's children. It was only a very small attendance, but I presume select. The little Battenbergs were the most mischievous children I can remember—Prince Alexander, or "Drino," as he was known then, being the ringleader. Princess Ena was lovely, with golden curls all over her head and ■ perfect complexion. Then there was my favourite Prince Leopold whom I loved dearly with his wistful eyes and small delicate face. Little Prince Maurice was too young when we first went there to enter into the classes, but his nurse used to bring him in for an hour to watch us.

We used to have great fun after the classes were over, running three-legged races down the long corridors. During

the dancing, Prince Drino would give sly imitations of Mrs. Wordsworth, who, so one report had it, was the possessor of a wooden leg. How we longed to discover the real truth about that leg. We plotted and planned all sorts of ways that none of us quite dared fulfil.

Half-way through the class, the doors would be flung open with a flourish, and Queen Victoria would sweep into the room and sit herself down on an enormous chair like a throne to watch us. She would always be in black, and would wear a full skirt like a crinoline. This skirt with its big black fullness added tremendously to the dignity of that diminutive figure. It did not seem somehow as if she was walking, she seemed to be floating along the surface of the parquet floor, and the noise of her skirt as she passed us was as the noise of rustling leaves. She had a black shining stick she would lean on, and the tap, tap, tap of that stick as we heard her approaching would fill us with fear. After she was seated, Doll and I would go tremblingly up to her to make our curtsies, and then, with a final tap of her stick, the Queen would command the dancing to begin. She liked all the fancy steps and would nod encouragingly at us as we went by. Everything would go extremely well until the last march past, in which we were supposed to go in a rhythmic procession by the high chair and the dais, and make our obeisance to the Queen as we went by. A rollicking march was struck up on the piano and, headed by Mrs. Wordsworth herself, we would begin our parade. But alas for little Prince Leopold, who simply could not or would not march in time. Whether he got scared as the time approached, or whether he was not really trying, it was impossible to say; but the fact remained, he was never in step and never in time. Mrs. Wordsworth would shout, and how she could shout, Queen Victoria would thump the floor furiously with her stick, and Prince Leopold would howl at the top of his shrill little voice. Then the Queen would order him to stand in front of her and she would shake her stick at him and say: "You are a very, very naughty little boy," and the poor little prince would set up a fresh howl of misery.

The class would end in a riot of rage and confusion, and the Queen would sweep out of the room rather flushed and upset, and without so much as a glance at any of us.

Then Mrs. Wordsworth would fall upon the weeping Prince and, glaring at him furiously, threaten him with every conceivable and terrifying punishment if he did not do better the following week. We would all troop out of the ballroom, rather awed and subdued, except Doll, who would toss back her hair and look contemptuously at Prince Leopold and say: "Silly little thing, he spoils everything." But my heart would ache for him, he was so small and pale and wistful.

We went to a birthday party at the Castle, I think it was Princess Ena's—I remember there was a wonderful cake and crackers, and Prince Henry of Battenberg came in and gave us rides on his shoulder. He was good-looking and charming, and Doll and I used to make up romantic stories about him. All this took place, I think, in the year 1891.

A year or two later Princess Ena was thrown from her pony on to her head and had very bad concussion and the dancing classes came to an end. How we missed the races down the long corridors, and the fun we had rolling on the floor and fighting. When the classes were resumed they were no longer at the Castle but at the White Hart Hotel, and only Princess Ena was present, as the princes had gone to school. I remember we were told to be very quiet and gentle with the Princess as she was still very far from well. It seemed so strange to see her with her fair hair no longer curled, but quite straight round her small, pale face. She was shy and timid, and tired very easily, and she was not allowed to ride again for a very long time.

I do not suppose if my mother had tried she could have brought into the world four more different children than we were. It was not only that we did not look alike, but our natures were entirely apart. Yet we did not quarrel, not more than most children of that age quarrelled, we were separate, that was all, in everything that we did, and our games were secret games we concealed from one another. On rare occasions we held meetings, and would sit in a row on the top of a high red brick wall that rounded off the back yard.

There we would talk of all our hopes and fears for the future. Not that we really were afraid, we were far too full of the confidence of youth to imagine that any one of us could possibly fail in whatever we set out to do. When I think back on those conversations I realize that it was Oliver and Doll who did most of the talking. Maurice was usually eating something, and I could never express myself, and I was rather nervous at the narrowness of the wall we were sitting on. I would listen miserably with my adenoids aching and my mind struggling in a cloud. Doll was very cold and self-possessed and sarcastic. She knew what she wanted, and she was going her own way to get it. She was not going to be ruled by any silly governesses, she was going to find out everything for herself. "Mumsie is all right," she would say, "but she doesn't know anything."

"She must know something," Oliver would reply, winking slyly round, "after all, she's had all of us."

"Oh that," Doll would say loftily, "that's nothing—that's natural."

"But you don't know how she did it," Oliver would cry. "I bet you anything you like you don't."

Back she would toss the lovely auburn hair, for now it was no longer gold but of a rich redness like chestnuts; and a disdainful smile would pass over her face.

"I've never wanted to know," she would reply. "If I had I should have found out long ago."

"How?"

"Yes, how?" I would echo—because I always had wanted to know terribly.

"Oh never mind how," Doll would reply a little angrily by then, "I would just find out—that's all."

I think at that time my eldest brother Oliver had the most charm of us all, at least as far as I was concerned he had. It may have been because he was the eldest and I respected him in consequence. He was a good-looking brown-cheeked boy with large dark eyes that dreamed. There was something about him even then that made him different from the ordinary boy. He did not indulge in games very much but preferred to sit by himself and read. He was a tremendous believer in family tradition and ancestors, and the link between present

and past. I think he was the only one of us at that time who really cared of what stuff he was made. But that was not what made him so fascinating to me—it was his nimble brain and ready wit. He seemed to see the funny side of everything. Maurice was just a plump little boy, rosy-faced and brim-full of mischief—he was the absolute darling of my father's life, and at that time very much spoilt by him, for Maurice had moods—black devils that sat on his shoulder and reduced him to sulking silence, stretched on his face on the floor. When Maurice sulked the whole house changed countenance—there could not have been anywhere a more difficult little boy to deal with, and yet he grew eventually into one of the sweetest men in the world. It only goes to prove that however much you may spoil a child, if there is good in that child, the spoiling will all pass by. There was good in Maurice, and although we could not see it then, my father, who had a genius for sensing who and what was worth while, knew that out of all his children, this one who seemed such a little black sheep was in reality the ewe lamb out of his flock.

There are three things in my childhood that I regret, and as one of them concerns this little brother of mine, I had better recount them before they get immersed in things that may be of more importance. Yet, it is strange, when one comes to look back on one's life, how it is these little happenings that haunt one's old age, and stir in one's crowded brain. It is the meannesses in a life that stand out—the ignoble, ungenerous, worthless tricks that I suppose everyone has played in their day. Only a trifling thing maybe in its consequent result, but even now, as I think of these three happenings, it hurts; even after all these years that have passed between me and them, they give a little twist to my heart, and a regret and a strong desire to return again and retrace my steps and put what was wrong to right.

I really think what makes me remember these things is because they have been enacted out of passion or rage or revenge. In these three cases I know that two of them were revenge and an intense desire to have everything in life I could get, and have it in my own way—I was jealous of everyone and everything, and most of all was I jealous of my father's evident preference for his youngest son. I simply could not

see what he had in him that I myself lacked, and I longed and longed to see him as the under-dog and myself climbing in his place.

The first instance was this—I remember I was going for a ride on a rather dilapidated old mowing-machine pony we had, whose name was Kitty. It was a day of sudden gusts of hurricane wind that swept the rose petals on to the lawn, and bent the flowers downwards to the earth. Kitty had been brought round to the front garden where there was a large glass door leading into the house. Maurice was playing close by, or pretending to play, but in reality he was squatting on the grass and glaring at Kitty because it was my turn to ride and not his. When I came out ready for my ride, Maurice turned his back on me, yet, all the time I was giving Kitty her sugar, I could somehow sense that he was watching me. It was because of this secret staring of his that an idea for revenge on Maurice came into my head. Why not leave the glass door just a tiny bit open, then the wind would catch it and swing it to and fro so that eventually it would close with a bang and the glass would be shattered to atoms. With a thrill of delight at my cleverness I half closed the door, jumped on to Kitty and I was off. I went until I was concealed by a large clump of mauve rhododendron bushes, and there I waited. I had not long to wait—there was a terrific crash, and the clattering of falling glass. With a shout of exquisite triumph, I went on my ride.

Two hours later when I returned I found the whole house in an uproar. Maurice was confined to his room until I had been questioned by my father. "Had I left the glass door open when I went out?"

"Oh, no, no, no, of course, I would never do a thing like that."

"Was I sure?"

"Yes, quite, quite sure, because I remembered closing it gently in case the wind should tear it out of my hand and break it."

The lies rolled out of my mouth so easily, so gladly. I was amazed how little shame I felt. It was the first time I had been able to talk freely without feeling suppressed and self-conscious. My blood was up—this revenge gave colour to the usual

greyness of my thoughts. I told my parents that Maurice had seen me go, that he had been in one of his "black devil" moods because he was not able to ride. For, although the boys had their own pony, it did not prevent them wanting ours as well.

My father was really angry—I had never believed he could be capable of being so angry with his youngest son. Maurice was had down to the library and severely caned, and I listened at the door to his tears and rejoiced.

The second instance was even more shaming than this, because the motive was infinitely meaner. We were given half a crown a week, Doll and I, as a kind of pocket allowance, and I used to carry mine about with me always for fear that I would lose it. One afternoon on our way to make our purchases, we met a little ragged boy who was standing begging on the kerb of the pavement. Now I had in my hand one penny as well as the half-crown and as I passed the little boy I slipped this into his cap, then I trotted after Doll, feeling extraordinarily pleased at my charitable action. Imagine my horror when I looked for my silver coin a minute later and found that I had given it away instead of the penny. With my heart consumed with rage I retraced my steps. I caught up with the little ragged boy and I seized him by the hand. One by one I bent back his icy cold fingers, whilst he stared at me with round and startled eyes. He tried to hold on to that coin, but I was older and stronger than he was. It did not take me long to bend back those little frozen fingers and snatch the half-crown back into my hand. I let him have the penny in place of it, I actually had the decency to do that—but what amazes me now is that I had the heart to take back from anyone so small and poor what I had given.

The third incident happened many years later. I waylaid a telegraph boy, and opened a telegram, altered the wording, closed it up again and let it continue on its way. It was a question of "yes" or "no" about a proposed visit to the seaside, and Doll and I, as it happened, did not want to go away with the particular person who had been deputed to take us. We watched her receive the telegram, open it and read it. "What a pity!" she exclaimed. "We can't go after all."

"Dear me," I answered, "that is a pity, isn't it?"

But outside the door Doll and I danced and giggled with delight. This was not in reality either hurtful or evil, but there was a criminal spirit about the way it was done. I felt guilty whenever I met a telegraph boy for a long time afterwards, and the fact that I even remember doing it proves that my conscience has never been quite clear of it. Even now when I think back I can still hear Maurice howling, and I can see his little round, red face streaming with tears—the only beating he ever had and for something he had not really done. I can still feel the icy cold hands of the little ragged boy, and hear the funny cracking sound as I bent back his fingers one by one.

One of the best times we had at Orchard Lea was when the Ascot races began. There was a beautiful iron gate at the end of our garden that led into the open road between Maidenhead and Ascot. For two solid hours the traffic would pass in an unceasing stream—coaches, carriages and wagonettes, for in those days, of course, there were no cars. Outside our iron gate there were two little patches of well-mown grass, and there we would be, all four of us, turning somersaults and cartwheels, and holding out our hands for pennies. Oh, it was fun, rolling head over heels on that cool green grass, and to see the lovely frocks go by, and the men laughing at us from the tops of the coaches. And how proud we were of our pennies—all except Doll who was rather haughty about it and said that she thought she was getting a little old to expose so much of her underwear in public. On the other hand, she was not too old to partake of her share of the spoil.

As we grew up we were obliged, of course, to give up our acrobatics, and we threw bunches of roses into the carriages and coaches instead. I remember Sir Walter Gilbey stopping and presenting us with an enormous basket of fruit, he was the only one who acknowledged our roses in such a generous and gracious way.

There now comes rather a gap in my memory when we lived for long spells at a time at Orchard Lea—it seems to be a space

of vague visions and happenings that apparently did not impress me enough to remember them. People flashed on to the screen and were gone again—Lord Rosebery, Sir William Harcourt, Arthur Balfour and his beautiful brother Gerald—a kaleidoscope of fame passing almost unheeded before our inexperienced eyes. I do remember Lord Rosebery learning to ride a bicycle in our garden. It was an unusual thing in those days for members of the aristocracy to so far unbend to the modern progression, and we would all turn out into the garden with awe to watch this great man in his leisure moments. He could ride the thing perfectly, but, once he was in the saddle, he was there for the day unless he threw himself off on to the grass. He would flash by, his noble features contorted with fear, his eyes distended. Round and round the lawn he would pedal, and each time he passed us he would attempt to smile reassuringly as much as to say: "Isn't this a joke?" Then, from some distant flower bed would come a crash! and we would all run breathlessly to see what remained of the gallant earl. Oddly enough he was never hurt. We would find him sitting serenely smiling amidst crushed pansies and rose trees. "It's quite all right," he would say haughtily, "I was only getting off."

It was a curious life for children—the house was almost continually filled with famous people. We hardly ever met anyone of our own age because we had no special friends of either sex. At meal times we would sit dumbly listening to conversation of such a brilliant order that we became imbued with a kind of dull despair, and inferiority complex. Doll was so pretty it did not seem to matter so much for her. Her silence was at least decorative, and the guests, whoever they happened to be, could at any rate feast upon her beauty. We had been taught from our earliest childhood that the superior sex was male, so my brothers felt secure in their pre-eminence, but I would sit there like an anæmic suet pudding, suffering the tortures of stupidity. My brain simply would not work—I could feel it stirring and struggling frantically in my head. I was panic-stricken that someone would address me, or that my father in one of his lighter moods, would ask me some ordinary question such as: "Who was the Prime Minister? What relation was the Prince of Wales to Queen Victoria?"

What was the capital of France and so on and so forth—questions I knew so well, and could have answered so easily in the secrecy of my room, but the moment he asked me them, and because I wanted to impress him with my knowledge, I could only stare dumbly at him, my heart beating and my whole inside turning and churning within me, until, with a howl I would push back my chair and rush weeping from the room. I do not remember a single meal at that time that did not end in tears. It seemed that my capacity for unhappiness would and could have no end. Most of my tears were shed in a little lavatory at the end of a passage—there, behind that simple door my lamentations and I were firmly locked. I wonder how many lavatories in houses where there are children have been the haven of their tears?

The youngest person who came to Orchard Lea at that time was a boy called Teddie Seymour. I think I can easily say he was the infinite joy of my childhood. My father adored him and he used to stay with us for months at a time. He was so good-looking with his golden hair and blue eyes, and he had a lovely laughing voice. Of course he was spoilt by my father and he could do exactly as he liked. I used to fetch and carry for him like a slave. There was not a thing I would not have done for him. "Teddie's shadow," I was called, and Doll and the boys would laugh at me for my devotion. But he was so charming in his good-natured, lordly way, nobody could possibly help loving him wherever he went.

Loulou Harcourt was one of my father's greatest friends; he also stayed a lot at Orchard Lea. I do not think I have ever met anyone since who had more charm than Loulou. His voice, his manner, his smile—everything about him was so fascinating that if he was in the room there seemed to be nobody else. He was the same to everyone, poor or rich, young or old. In books you may read of a "velvet" voice and think to yourself that, of course, there is no such thing—Loulou Harcourt possessed such a quality of tone. It would make everything he was saying sound like a caress.

Sometimes Sir William Harcourt would come for the week-end, and to see the father and son together was a genuine delight. They were both unusually tall men, only Sir William was of a heavier build and had a great many chins. But they

loved one another, these two, and their fondness illuminated their public life together as well as in the privacy of their homes.

My mother and Loulou would garden for hours together. They were both very proud of their knowledge, and would pretend to quarrel over the names of unusual plants. They would set traps for one another, but my mother could always hold her own, and even Loulu had to admit that as far as flowers were concerned she was unbeaten.

When Loulou married, my father was very anxious and upset, thinking that his friendship for this man might be disturbed, but May Harcourt fitted into our family like a glove and he could not have chosen a wife who seemed so much part of what had been before.

Orchard Lea was one of the loveliest places in the world—the garden was just the kind of garden that every country house should possess: it had all been designed by my parents, all created from an expanse of grass and scattered trees. In summer it became a riot of roses and iron chains swinging with variegated clematis. There was an enormous weeping willow on the lawn, looking like a fat old lady amongst the lean-stemmed oaks. Right at the end of the lawn there was what my parents called "Pan's Garden" where, amidst flower beds and green grass paths, an immense statue of Pan playing his pipes, his shoulders bent, and his face grinning with evil, terrified me so much I would never venture there alone. A red brick terrace ran one side of this garden, and beyond the terrace was a meadow that led towards the farm. In the kitchen garden there were herbaceous borders and brick paths, slippery to walk upon, but lovely. High red brick walls surrounded the garden upon which grew peaches and apricots and golden plums. Behind the herbaceous borders netted fruit was artfully concealed, such as strawberries, raspberries and currants. Bromwich, the gardener, would spend most of his time chasing us out of the nets, but we were too many for him. Doll and I would keep him busy at one end of the garden, whilst the boys stole the fruit in the other.

We all had apple trees that belonged to us, and I remember mine so vividly—it stood outside the wall garden in a tiny orchard and it was a small and ugly tree that nobody else

would have so much as glanced at, but the apples on it were sweeter than on any other tree, and they were scarlet all over and glistened in the sun. I loved my mis-shapen tree and I christened it "Rosy." It was not a very original name and I did not ever dare tell anyone about it, not even Doll.

There was a wood at Orchard Lea that led direct to the farm, with a little grey path running through it made of ashes, and it was in this wood we first discovered our mysterious "Rabbit Stone." It was only a great flat, white stone lying alone in the grass, but we made out of it a thing of magic and of charm. We had but to tap on its smooth white surface and a door would open and let us in under the earth, then, like Alice in Wonderland, we could enact all sorts of dramas. We would become, as it were, miracle people. We would be daring and unafraid. When we emerged from this precious underground world, we were at once "real" again, and the wood assumed monstrous proportions and became a black tangle of shadows and shapes. We would run headlong away from our "Rabbit Stone" over a little wooden bridge and into the sunlit garden again. Part of the pleasure of going to the stone was that the only way to it was laden with fear.

When we were a little older and considered ourselves too grown up for our invisible kingdom, we gave up our underground world and we built wigwams in the wood in place of it. These wigwams were made out of twigs and foliage and bits of old sacking stolen from the back yard. We would play at being Indians with their squaws—I was always Maurice's squaw and he would rule me with a rod of iron. He would keep me shut up inside his wigwam because he said I was not to be seen by the other Indians. Doll was Oliver's squaw, but she was allowed out, mostly because Oliver had found no possible means of keeping her in. No one could ever make Doll do a thing she did not want to. She was never afraid of the boys, but I was, and Maurice would always threaten me by saying that if I did not stay in the wigwam, he would go to the Rabbit Stone and get himself turned into an ogre and gobble me up.

The days I liked best were the days when Doll and I played alone—they were quiet games, with no hair to be pulled, and arms to be twisted round. We had two large stuffed

animals almost life-size—hers was a camel and mine was a spotted deer. We would perch ourselves on the backs of two high arm-chairs, and pretend we were driving to London. We had proper reins and little coachmen's whips. I adored my spotted deer ■ I imagined it trotting before me, and I rather despised Doll and her camel—it had too long a neck, and its hump had got the moth, whereas my deer was smooth and glossy and unblemished.

As we were driving to London we used to pretend what our purpose was—sometimes we were great ladies driving to meet out lovers, but more often we were such people as sweeps, or butchers, or tinkers, and Doll would dress herself up in a sailor suit she had and pin all her beautiful hair away under a diminutive sailor hat. This tendency to dress as a boy grew upon Doll, and often she would sit in front of the fire, her trousered legs crossed, and her arms folded, staring and staring into the flames. I used to so wonder what she was thinking of, and sometimes I would ask her: "What is it, Doll? What do you see in the fire?"

"Oh, just things," she would reply.

"But what sort of things?"

"Things I am going to do, and be" she would reply and that was all I could ever draw out of her of those early dreams. Anything less masculine in appearance than she was then can hardly be imagined, but she had a boy's mentality. She was unafraid of anything except the dark—in the dark she would become a little girl again, trembling and crying. I think the reason of this was that she had been badly frightened at the age of about five. It was at the time when a song was being sung everywhere called "Hush, Hush, Hush, Here Comes the Bogy Man." Doll really hated this song, and, of course, the moment the boys discovered this, they never left it alone. Everywhere she went it followed her, sometimes in terrifying whispers, or growls, or a plaintive whining note that seemed as if the singers wept. One night, Oliver went even further. He concealed himself in a bolster case and crept into the dimly lighted nursery, hissing out the words as he approached. The shriek that Doll let forth was enough to rouse the dead. Cold water had to be splashed on to her face, and it was many hours before she could be quieted. But she was never quite

the same again, not even when she grew up, and could never sleep without a night-light in her room.

I think the person I loved most in those far-off days was my grandfather, my father's father. We used to go sometimes and stay with our grandparents at their lovely house near Watford called Heath Farm. It would be impossible to find anywhere a sweeter old man than he was, with his snow-white hair growing like a soft halo round his head. He had lovely grey eyes, and he was always chuckling to himself. It was one of the finest old faces you could possibly have seen, wrinkled with kindness and good nature. I used to sit on his knee for hours and beg him to marry me. "I'll never, never marry anyone else," I would assure him.

He would pat my head and say quite seriously: "Well, well, we'll see about it, but don't you think we are both a little young?"

"I am not," I would declare stoutly. "I am as old as the hills really, if only you knew."

"But we are not quite old enough to know our own minds," he would chuckle, "now are we?"

"But I know mine," I would cry, snuggling down into his arms, "and I know I want to marry you."

My grandmother was rather frightening. She did not mean to be, it was just her manner. She had beautiful proud features, and a small, imperious nose: she had been in the Book of Beauty in her day, and she never lost the outline of those looks. Everything she did was wonderful in his eyes, they were sweethearts in their seventieth and eightieth years. The only time I ever saw him annoyed with her was when we would drive into Watford to shop. He and I would wait in the carriage outside for sometimes over an hour—half-way through the time he would start fuming and fussing with rage. "God damn the woman!" he would cry, "is she buying the whole shop?" and then would follow a string of the most fearsome oaths that even the coachman seemed to shrivel and shrink upon the box—but when she would emerge from the shop with one diminutive parcel carried pompously by the groom, and rustling into the carriage beside him, take his hand and say sweetly: "I hope I haven't kept you waiting, darling." He would reply: "Not at all, my love, I hardly noticed the time."

But he would wink at me as much as to say: "For Heaven's sake don't you dare give me away." He used to walk about his garden with a very long stick that had a whistle on the end of it, so that if he wanted to call the gardener, he had but to put the stick to his lips and whistle shrilly. It gave him ■ sense of security when he was out walking without her.

Once I went and sat on the Bench with him to watch him try ■ case. I remember I sat in an enormous wooden chair with carved arms to it, and I was so small that my boots stuck straight out in front of me—button boots they were, and rather worn in places, and one of the boots had a button missing, and ■ piece of thread sticking up on end. This piece of thread appalled me so that I lost much of interest that was taking place. It seemed so much more important to me that I should not appear shabbily turned out in front of those majestic judges, and I was in an agony in case they should notice that gap in my button boots. The case being tried was a poor one—the prisoner, a white-faced, miserable specimen, very abject and cringing in manner—the only thing I remember very clearly about him was the thinness and pallor of his hands, and the way his knuckles stood out on them, scarlet, like drops of blood, as he clung to the rail before him. I remember my grandfather pronouncing some sentence upon him, and the man being swept from the dock like a leaf in a gust of wind—then another face appeared, round and red and embarrassed, and I think I fell asleep.

When my grandfather died I thought I would never get over it. Even now when I think of his death it gives ■ funny twist to my heart that hurts. I was not taken to see him when he was ill, it was thought that I was too young and the change in him might frighten me, but I remember ■ French maid of my grandmother's, called Elise, saying that she was sure it was all her fault my Grandfather had died because she had washed his head on too cold a day—I never forgave that maid, and afterwards when she was in the kitchen bending over some beef that was roasting, and her hair was caught up in the spit as it spun round, I gloated over the agony that was hers. Night after night I would lie and imagine that mouse-coloured hair of hers turning in and out of the iron hook, and being, wrenched root by root out of her head. "It serves her right,"

I said over and over again to myself. "It serves her right.—It serves her right.—She has destroyed the one person I love most, and it serves her—right."

Very often for the holidays Doll and I would be sent to my father's sister, Mrs. Dudley Ward, to stay, whilst my parents took the boys away with them. Aunt Violet had a house at Bembridge, with a little winding path that led down the face of the cliffs to the sea. Later on she took a house in Scotland near Aboyne called Bogieshiel, and we would both go there with her. How she could have been bothered with us I do not know, for she already had five children of her own. My cousins were all beautiful, which was not surprising, considering how lovely was Aunt Violet, and how handsome was Uncle Dudley. Duddie, Charlie, Sybil, Viola and Eugenie—those were my cousins, and it was impossible to really say which was the best-looking. I suppose, in a way Charlie had the least regular features, but I was fonder of him than all the others, and that friendship has remained until to-day. We have always had a sympathy towards each other, and the things we do, and the way we think. We seemed to be rolling stones, he and I, and I am sure when he was very young he felt out of things just as I did. Of course, we had quarrels, cousins always do—terrible stormy rows that sometimes ended in blows. But we very soon made it up again, and on the whole we were the best of friends. Sybil was beautiful; Viola had a lovely, mischievous charm; Eugenie, or Babs as she was known, had masses and masses of golden hair, and she was very pretty. Doll and I looked colourless and insignificant against them all, and I could never quite be at my ease because of this. It was only with Uncle Dudley I was really at ease, although we were all a little afraid of him—he was such a great, big, rollicking, laughing kind of man, utterly unlike anyone I had ever met when I was at home. Sometimes at Bembridge he would take me out for a sail in his racing boat; there was nothing he did not know about sailing, and everyone knew him all round and about the Isle

of Wight because of it. Once when he took me out sailing with him we got caught in a storm and nearly upset. I remember him so well as I clung desperately in a corner of the boat, watching him manipulating the sails and listening to his oaths. I remember how thrilled I was with him when he brought the boat safely into harbour, and how I described the scene over and over again to my cousins—"Uncle Dudley was so wonderful," I kept saying. "He wasn't a bit scared. I think it is so brave not to be scared, don't you?"

Sybil, stretched upon a sofa, cool and graceful and lovely to look at, gave me one of her condescending little smiles—there was nobody who could be more withering than she was at that age, and yet one could not but admire her. "She's papa's champion, isn't she?" she said, closing one eye in a somewhat superb wink, "the funny little Flea."

She always would call me a funny little Flea, and, of course, when I was young I resented it—there seemed to be no repartee to it except to put out one's tongue, which Babs and I indulged in frequently without the slightest effect. Nothing affected Sybil. We all flared up and fought and stormed with tears—but she, whatever the argument was, remained coolly sarcastic and incredibly lovely to look at.

Uncle Dudley and I became very fast friends. I think he knew in his heart that I rather admired him and I always laughed at his jokes. He used to give me money for decorating the dining-room table with flowers, and I would try and think out all sorts of new designs to please him, because when he was pleased he gave me half a crown for my efforts instead of a shilling. There was something about this swashbuckling type of man that fascinated me. He was one of those people who seemed to fill a room with his presence. He had a great big body and a great big voice, and a kind of good-natured disregard of anyone else's feelings but his own. His eldest son, Duddie, was charming also—good-looking, lucky Duddie, we called him in those days. Everything seemed to come his way, and he was successful in whatever he set himself out to do. He seemed to know what he wanted out of life, and how to get it; unlike my poor, little, red-headed Charlie, who was so happy-go-lucky and so sweet.

When Uncle Dudley died, I missed this merry relation of

mine, he had been a kind of high light of colour in my life. Aunt Violet had another little girl by then, born fourteen years after Babs—her name was Enid. She also was lovely. I suppose it would have been impossible for Aunt Violet to bring any child into the world who was not. But it always seemed to me unfair, when I looked at my own reflection, that my mother's family had not fared so well. Aunt Violet has always seemed to me to be the perfect wife and ideal mother. Her life was not always an easy one, but she carried any misfortune that befell her quietly and uncomplainingly. Even now if I was in any trouble I would always tell Aunt Violet—she is sweet and kind and considerate, and a haven of refuge in any storm.

There were other cousins we visited. My mother had two sisters, one unmarried, whose name was Louise, a brilliant, witty woman, whose house was continually filled with all the artists and musicians of the day—and the other, whose name was Alice, who was married to Charlie Brand, and who lived in a lovely house on the Sussex downs. I often think Maurice's black devils were inherited from this aunt of mine, for as she grew older she became a victim to these moods, and could not conceal them. She was an invalid for many years and so was her sister, though my mother, who was many years younger, has, I am glad to say, hardly had a day's illness in her life. Alice Brand had four children: Betty, who I am sorry to say is no longer alive; Ruth, who married the late Lord Monk Bretton; Jack, who died some years ago, and who was the stepfather of the present, lovely, little Lady Warwick, and Eve, who married Sir James Crerar.

Eve became my great friend at that time—she had a sweet, pert, little face with round, dark eyes like beads, and her cheeks were so red they reminded me of my apple tree Rosy. She was very excitable and highly strung, and anxious to please everyone. But what I loved about her most was the fun in her, and the laughter and her utter lack of conceit. She was always falling in and out of love, mostly with boy cousins of hers, and she would wring her hands and lament over her loves as if they really mattered, which she knew in her heart they did not. Sentimental, sweet, little Eve, I often yearn for those far-off days when she and I were such inseparable friends.

But marriage is the great divider, especially for women—they seem to step straight out of their own lives and into their husband's, and his environment becomes theirs. I do not think I have ever known a husband to lose any of his friends when he married, but I do not think I have ever known a wife keep any of hers for very long.

Close to Orchard Lea then was an enormous house and estate where my mother's brother, Victor Van de Weyer, lived, it was called New Lodge. He was about twenty years older than she was. They were more of a hunting family than the Brands, in that it was the only thing they cared about—they seemed only to live for that season in the year. There were seven of my cousins, three girls and four boys, and they all rode, and rode well. Aunt Min was small and vivacious and a typical sportswoman, but my uncle had the benevolent expression of a Father Christmas with his crisp, greying beard and full red cheeks. When he was getting old, he fell from his horse and broke both his knee-caps, so that when he went out hunting he was strapped on to his horse. Brave—yes, he was fearless enough when it came to those hunting months. We used to follow the hounds sometimes, watching them from the road ■ we drove along in our pony-cart, but I never really cared for it, it always seemed to me so unbelievably cruel. Baying hounds, galloping horses, blood-curdling cries, all in pursuit of a small brown animal with its ears laid back, and frantic fear in its heart. A fox ran into the garden at Orchard Lea once, and I thought it would be safe there, but my uncle and one or two others came in with the hounds and traced the fox to where it lay concealed. I shall never forget the look on that small creature's face as it turned to defend itself—the utter despair in its eyes as the hounds began their attack. I never went to a meet again, and being young and intolerant, I looked upon my cousins ever afterwards ■ inhuman monsters.

And so we went on, our life balancing between country and town. I cannot remember No. 1 Tilney Street very well except for the clock with the shining halo, and my father's library, with him in his black velvet coat. I can remember going for walks in the parks, and being very smartly dressed. Doll and I used to walk along the top of the low railings, much

to the annoyance of our nurse, and we had a double pram in which we sat side by side. There were two frocks we used to wear I remember so vividly—one in emerald green velvet with white lace collars and cuffs. I remember thinking the white lace ugly against the brightness of the green—the other was a Japanese silk, all blue and white, and it had a lovely sapphire blue velvet sash. We were both dressed alike, which upset Doll considerably because she hated feminine fripperies, and linen and lace. She would even tear all the frocks off her dolls and dress them up in trousers. She would cut off their curls and smooth down their partings and call all my dolls cry-babies because they were girls. There was only one doll she ever kept unbroken—it had belonged to my mother when she was young, and wore a beautiful brocade frock of old-fashioned design, the features were modelled in wax from which all the colour had faded, but there was something so exquisite about it that even my sister was awed into respect. She kept that doll until she was quite grown up. It amused my mother once to buy us some frocks that had little bustles attached to them at the back. The reason I remember this frock so well is that my mother's tame squirrel, who used to roam round the house, climbed up my skirt one day and curled itself up on my bustle. Of course I screamed the place down. I ran about screaming, and the faster I ran, the closer the squirrel hung on to my bustle. Eventually I fell sprawling on to my face, and after nipping me severely in the leg, as a remonstrance, I suppose, for my unnatural behaviour, the squirrel ran out. Nothing would induce me to wear that frock again until the bustle had been removed.

The boys were at a private school at Farnborough. I shall never forget the excitement and stir there was when a letter arrived from Maurice saying how unhappy he was at school, and how he was not going to stand it any longer, and he would run away and never come back again. At the end of the letter there was a PS.—“Please send me some pocket money and some sweets.”

Poor, little, round-faced boy. No wonder he was unhappy. No more spoiling—he was no longer the one, but one of many. What a contrast it must have been to his life at home. He did not run away, of course, and came home for the holidays to

be spoilt again. My father could not help it, there was something about this second son of his that softened and touched him. With what infinite patience he moulded and formed that character—how gently and wisely he directed those wayward and stubborn feet into the eventual path that was trodden so unselfishly. Maurice became rather a model boy at Eton and at Sandhurst, but the black devils remained with him until he married.

When we were at Orchard Lea we used to get up some tableaux. We actually had a governess at that time who was able to remain with us many years—her name was Miss Harvey. She was really extraordinarily kind to us and she had a way of teaching that was fascinating. Say we were having a history morning, well, she would write down about twenty questions on little pieces of paper, fold them up and throw them in a heap in the middle of the table, then Doll and I would draw from the heap and have the terrified thrill of opening these papers to see what questions we had. Although I knew I would be unable to answer any of them, there was something about the undoing of those little bits of paper that filled the lessons with adventure. Poor Miss Harvey—she tried so hard, and must have been so disappointed in our dumbness. We only went in for one examination, it was the College of Preceptors exam, and was held at Windsor—the only thing I can remember about it was being locked in the lavatory and having to climb out through a very small window, and fall into the arms of a dustman who was cleaning the street below. All the girls knew what had happened to me, and there was a question mark of “How on earth did you get out?” on every raised face as I entered the examination room. Needless to say, I did not pass—it only needed a thing like that to make every idea go out of my head for a year.

Being educated did not appear to be quite in my line. History meant the most to me—geography did not seem to me to have any connection with the world at all—arithmetic seemed fantastic and absurd: that there were four gills in a

pint I knew, but it conveyed no definite quantity because I did not know what a gill looked like. Two gallons making a peck merely amused me—what was a peck?—what *is* a peck? I have not the slightest idea to this day. I liked the Scripture lessons, especially the New Testament, and I loved my Prayer Book with its marriage service and burial of the dead. If only everything that had to be taught could have been turned into a story, I could have learned so easily, that is why I envy the children of to-day who can see pages of their history and their Bible on the films—not always correct according to the script, but historical enough to bring kings and queens and the heroes of long ago to life, so that their names, instead of being dead and flat in the pages of a heavy book, are vivid and alive and as real to them as if it had happened yesterday.

As it was, Miss Harvey would sit with two expressionless little girls staring hopelessly before them—Doll would not learn, and I could not.

But the tableaux brought excitement into the house. We used to make wonderful scenery by cutting out the flowers on slips of wallpaper that were bought especially for the occasion, and sticking them on to almost invisible muslin. We made forests and gardens and lovely views, and standing at the back of the room you could not see the light muslin at all, so that the trees looked as if they were really growing, and the flowers unbelievably alive. I remember Doll as "Little Saint Elizabeth," kneeling on a cushion with clasped hands, and her eyes lifted to heaven, and her lovely hair all round her shoulders. I stood in the wings jealously gnawing my fingers and thinking furiously to myself: "If only they knew how utterly unlike a saint she really is." Maurice was a statue of Cupid perched up on the top of packing-cases covered with white cloth—he really looked rather sweet with his little, plump, naked body all lit up, but he was hardly my idea of Cupid. Oliver was Napoleon at St. Helena—we concentrated a great deal on this tableau: the clothes were correct and we made some most realistic rocks out of old portmanteaux covered with canvas, and we painted a back scene of enormous clouds. Oliver stood with folded arms gazing dreamily at one of the portmanteaux, and he certainly looked very well. It

was our most spectacular effect, and brought forth a torrent of applause. I was the last tableau of all: I think I was meant to be May Yohé as she appeared in her famous number "Go to sleep, my little piccaninny." I know I held my old black doll in my arms, and I stood amongst bundles of poppies and corn, feeling very foolish and self-conscious and unreal. All the servants were had in as an audience and a few well-chosen neighbours. My father threw himself into the fun of it all with the greatest vehemence. He took enormous trouble over the slightest detail. I think this capacity for detail in everything he did was what led him in the end into being the great man that he was. He had a natural flair for things, but that was not enough for him. Whatever subject he touched on, however unimportant it was, he never rested until he had found out everything there was to know about it. It kept him incredibly young, this intense desire for knowledge, right up to the end. My mother was as interested as he was, or at any rate, she never once showed him or us that she was not. All the time she would watch him and be at his elbow in everything. No matter what was his inspiration, she fell into line with it and enjoyed it every bit as much as he did. When he tired of a thing, she tired also. Everything they did was done together. It seemed to be the perfect marriage—the companionship, devotion and understanding—and Doll and I would despair as we watched it, and wonder if our lives would be so generously filled. "To make the kettle amusing," was my mother's motto, and by that she meant that it is up to every woman to make her husband feel, as he opens his own door, that he is genuinely glad to get home, to make him content with his lot, and at peace with all the world. Men are, in reality, more domesticated than women, and I often think there must be something seriously wrong with the homes of those men whose heads one sees through the windows of clubs as one passes along the pavement.

Living as close as we were to Windsor Castle, we saw quite a lot of the Royal Family, not only in our own house, but at Windsor. When the present King was about eight years old, he came with Prince Albert and Princess Mary to spend the afternoon with us. We were told to look after them carefully, and never to let them out of our sight in case they should get

into mischief. They arrived in little white sailor suits, and Princess Mary in a kind of sailor frock with a white kilted skirt to it. They were very shy at first, and so, of course, were we, but the shyness soon wore off and then the trouble began. All went well for about an hour; we just had pillow fights and romped around as children will. Then one of us suggested hide-and-seek, and in the excitement of such a thrilling idea we quite forgot to ensure that one of us should always be with our important little guests, and only when we were half-way through the game did we realize that Prince Edward and Princess Mary had disappeared. Prince Albert was the only one with us. We did not dare tell our parents that they had gone, but rushed hither and thither through the garden searching for them, with our hearts in our mouths. Only Prince Albert was unconcerned. "They'll turn up," he kept repeating. "They always do. You see if I am not right." He was right. After about half an hour of agonizing searching they did turn up, a little red in the face and awkward. They would not tell us where they had been, so we all started playing again. But somehow, Prince Edward seemed to have lost interest in our games, and kept listening and watching for something to happen. Something did happen, in the shape of my father emerging furiously out of the house. When he drew near we could see that he was very much upset. A message had been sent from the house opposite, he said, to the effect that all the baby ducks by the lake had been chased and were scattered along the bank. Did any of us know anything about it?

There was not the slightest doubt who were the guilty pair, even if little Prince Edward had not stepped forward and said that he knew all about it, because it was he who had done it. Princess Mary tried to explain that she had been in it as well, but Prince Edward said: "No," very firmly. "I did it myself. She only came with me, that's all."

My father was really annoyed by then. He told Prince Edward that he was to go across to the house at once and ring the door bell, and go in and apologise to the lady of the house, whose name was Mrs. Corkran. At first Prince Edward refused, standing very stubbornly with his legs wide apart and his hands thrust deep into his pockets, but eight-years-old

defiance met with failure against my father's full determination. Prince Edward was obliged to go, and I can remember Mrs. Corkran saying afterwards that the apology was of such sweetness and charm that she found it impossible to resent the treatment of her ducklings.

There was only one more incident after this, when all three disappeared, but we were so shattered and exhausted by then we went straight to our parents and told them the dreadful news. Then what a hubbub ensued. The Royal tutor wringing his hands and glaring at us as if we were to blame, my father and mother rushing about the garden calling "David . . . David," through paths and shrubberies and rose garden, into the wall garden and even as far as the wood.

"Perhaps they've gone out in the road," said Doll, helpfully, "and got run over."

The tutor's face fascinated me. It was usually mild of expression and extraordinarily kind, but the look he gave Doll as she let forth this outrageous suggestion was entirely devoid of benevolence, and I feel sure he could willingly have wrung the neck of this self-possessed little girl who had had no better suggestion to offer than an accident and death. He kept repeating over and over again: "Oh dear, oh dear—oh dear, oh dear," and blowing his nose with an enormous, white, silk handkerchief; when suddenly a piercing scream came from the stables, and shouts of "Whoa there! Steady now!" and the sharp cracking of a whip. Round to the stables we tore, hot, dishevelled and terrified. Before our eyes was stretched the most amazing picture. The three of them had managed somehow to drag an enormous wagonette into the yard, and upon the driver's seat stood Prince Edward, perilously jumping up and down and cracking a whip and flicking at the reins to the end of which Princess Mary and Prince Albert were harnessed. They were kicking and prancing between the shafts, and endeavouring to pull the heavy wagonette towards the gate. Now and again they pretended to bite one another, and neighed in the shrillest of tones. It did not take the tutor long to clamber up into the wagonette, and Prince Edward was grabbed unceremoniously down and told it was time for them to go home. Ten minutes later they were on

their way back to Windsor, and Doll and I scattered to our rooms and lay flat on our beds, prostrated with fatigue.

It is not easy to write about the Royal Family without appearing a snob or title-loving, but my father was such a friend of them all, and his counsel and wisdom so sought after, we could not help coming in contact with them too, and seeing the princes and princesses in their own homes and in ours. Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, designed part of the garden—a living fan of roses opening between wide green paths. Prince and Princess Henry of Battenberg gave birthday tea-parties for their children, to which Doll and I were always asked. My father would recount little incidents of the Castle, making it all so real to us that we could visualize them in their home surroundings without the glamour of uniform or crown.

I remember my father talking about our present King, and asking my mother if she had noticed what a beautiful expression, and what a wonderful look, Prince Edward had in his eyes. "Only really great men have that look," he said. "Mark my words, Nellie, that boy will be a great man one day."

We heard so much about Prince Edward's "look," that I, with my usual furious jealousy, endeavoured to cultivate it. I would gaze out of the window with what I considered a rapt and interesting expression on my face, and a far-away pathos in my eyes, until one morning my father said irritably: "What on earth is the matter with Syv? Does she want a dose?" I gave up Prince Edward's "look" after that, and relapsed into my suet pudding self.

Sometimes my father and mother were asked to dinner at Windsor Castle. This invitation was always heralded by the arrival of a soldier on horseback, bearing with him the important envelope with the Royal crest stamped upon its surface. The moment we heard the clatter of hooves along the road we knew what it was, and Doll and I would run to the front door, which led straight into the road, so that we could pat the big black horse. It always gave us a thrill, this soldier

arriving, because we knew that it meant we could go to my mother's room and watch her dress. She had such beautiful jewels—I used to envy them as I saw her put them on. Sometimes sapphires, sometimes rubies, and later, the loveliest of emeralds. I never could make up my mind which I loved best. My father was always buying her new things. He was as fond of jewellery as she was, and had perfect taste. He was intensely artistic in all things, and collected pictures and old furniture, snuff-boxes, miniatures, medals and old books. He had some wonderful rapiers that hung all round the gallery wall. I loved these glittering things; some of the handles were exquisitely jewelled. Most of the rooms were filled with Jacobean furniture, that made strange noises cracking in the dark. It was so grim, and un-gay somehow. I never really liked it, but it suited the surroundings it was placed in. I had pet pictures I used to stand and talk to; an enormous painting by Millais of my grandfather as Master of the Rolls, the little King of Rome, Charles I and Henrietta Maria, Marlborough, with his full and sensitive lips, and William of Orange with his curling hair. They were the companions of that lonely and large house—I was content with them. I used to invent stories about them, in which I figured as a beautiful lady they all loved. It was a curious pastime, but they were an endless consolation. They never questioned me, these painted favourites of mine, and they never made me feel a fool.

We used to go out to tea sometimes, but very seldom. There was a Colonel and Mrs. Sawyer who lived near by, who had two girls, Marjory and Doris, we became very fond of, and saw perhaps more often than our cousins at New Lodge. But I think we preferred, at that time, to be alone. We became used to the silence, and made our lives round it. My father and mother were so inseparable; she would go with him to London whenever she could. They were never really happy when away from one another, and unless she went with him to London she never really had him to herself. We were always there, at every meal, two speechless little girls staring at them, and listening to everything they said. Sometimes they would try and draw us into conversation, but Doll and I never opened our mouths in public. What could we possibly have said that would have interested these two brilliant people?

Our little chatterings of this and that would have been so meaningless and thin. But it would annoy my father. The only thing he could not, and would not, tolerate was lack of intellect. He refused to have anyone who was dense and stupid around and about him, and that was why it was so hard on all of us. He would never talk down to any of us, and if we did not understand him, he would give us a look, so icy in its disapproval, that we could feel ourselves growing numb from head to heel. How could we possibly get anywhere near him, when half the time we had not the slightest idea of what he was talking about. The maxims of Napoleon, Mary Queen of Scots, Cæsar, religion, philosophy and music—what did we know of these things, except a few copy-book enlightenments? Only my mother could respond to him; she knew these things infinitely as well as he did. What an amazing intuition he must have had when he first met that slim, shy schoolgirl, to know that that child of sixteen would develop into the brilliant woman who was his wife. He had no such enlightenment as he gazed round upon his female offspring. My mother could keep a whole room amused by her quiet and caustic wit. We could not even interest him. I think it was mostly because he overshadowed us. He even overshadowed her, not from his own free will, but because she wished it so. She just listened to him and rejoiced, and built her whole life round him like a protecting wall.

When Maurice and I were cutting our teeth we had measles very badly, and it arrested their development and discoloured the new teeth. This was a source of the greatest agony to me. It seemed to me to be the last flaw in an otherwise hopeless face, and when Doll smashed my front teeth with a tennis racquet, it seemed to me to be the end. It seemed to accentuate a kind of morbid sensitiveness I already possessed, and made me, unnecessarily perhaps, awkward and shy. I never could laugh without concealing my face. No Mona Lisa smile for me. My amusement henceforth was to be a secret one, my smile a hidden and uncomfortable thing. I remember I used to pray to God that if ever I had children their mouths should be filled with gloriously white teeth.

The next event that I remember is perhaps no more than a vague vision to me really; a vision of masses and masses of

flowers, and people in black, and Chopin's Funeral March rolling its splendid way along a solemn procession of kings and queens, and princes and princesses. The funeral of Queen Victoria—the finale of that incredibly long reign, when a child was called upon the throne, and an aged woman left it for her son.

King Edward's coronation. A sick man standing bravely to be crowned, the nation waiting outside the iron railings to see if he would live, and then the nation waiting outside Westminster Abbey to see him made a king.

I think, at the risk of being labelled a snob, I must tell the tale of the coming of King Edward to Orchard Lea soon after he had ascended to the throne. It was the custom, apparently, to kiss the Royal hand on meeting the King for the first time after his coronation. This thought terrified us, and I can feel even now when I think of it the kind of numbness that comes over one's limbs when one feels one is incapable of facing a certain situation.

It was arranged that we children should be discovered on the croquet lawn and make our obeisances from there. We practised it over and over again, my father representing King Edward, and my mother giving instructions from the side. The advance, the curtsy, the kiss, and the retirement backwards. My father eyed me with icy disapproval when it came to my turn to advance.

"Must you waddle?" he said. "Don't you think you could manage to walk?"

My mother gazed anxiously at Doll, whose teeth were very prominent at that time. "I hope she doesn't bite his hand," she whispered to my father.

All this did not tend to give us confidence. Tremblingly we tried it over and over again, until my father pronounced us satisfactory. Then we retired to the croquet lawn and started a disjointed and inattentive game. Oliver and Maurice were comparatively composed. It was easier for them to bow and kiss the King's hand, but for Doll and me with our curtsies it was a far more complicated affair. If we went too near it was possible we might push His Majesty over; on the other hand, if we failed to approach near enough it would be more than likely that we would drag the Royal presence to the

ground. By the time we heard their voices approaching we had worked ourselves into a frenzy of fear.

"I think I am going to be sick," whispered Doll encouragingly.

"My legs simply refuse to move," I whispered back.

Only too soon King Edward was on the lawn, and a little way behind him my father and mother and Queen Alexandra stood.

Dragging my legs like weights behind me, I followed Doll, the boys being ahead of her. By the time I reached the King he had become bored by the procession of wooden-faced children, and impatient of the peckings at his hand. He only stretched his arm out a very little way towards me, and not expecting this, I started my curtsy too far away from him. The angle I was at as I kissed his hand could not have been anything but ridiculous. Queen Alexandra laughed, my mother laughed, my father looked at King Edward and smiled. The rest of the day was spent in Maurice imitating my performance, and in Doll saying: "Why didn't you do ■ I did? I was perfectly all right."

King Edward and Queen Alexandra came frequently to Orchard Lea. They loved the garden, I think, and they felt sheltered and concealed there. She was so beautiful with her sly, sideways look, and her mischievous smile, but King Edward was the most alarming person I have ever come across. He never for one instant lost his dignity, and it would always seem to me that however much he may have desired to, he was unable and incapable of relaxing this dignity that was so natural to him.

The next time he and Queen Alexandra came to Orchard Lea, I summoned up enough courage to ask the King to sign in my birthday book. He was sitting in my father's library, a room with red velvet curtains, and book-cases of cedar. My timid knock was received by an abrupt order to "Come in," and I entered the room with the book tucked under my arm. In a whisper, I asked him if he would sign in it. He smiled at me kindly. I daresay I was a sorry enough sight with my straight dark hair, and terrified face, stumbling and murmuring in front of him. "Of course I will," he replied. "But when is my birthday, little girl?"

I was stricken dumb. The worst had happened; I had been asked a question. Down came the fog over my brain, and that awful lost sensation entered my soul. Of course I knew when his birthday was, but do you think I could tell him? I could feel my mouth working, forming words, but not a sound came from me. The King must have thought I was about to burst into tears, because he drew me towards him and opened the book himself at the proper place. "It's all right," he said. "I've suddenly remembered," and chuckled to himself as he signed his name. "You must get the Queen to write in it too," he added. "I am sure she will be only too pleased if you ask her."

I backed and mumbled myself out of the room, but not before I had managed to pick up the band of his cigar I found



HIS MAJESTY KING EDWARD VII'S CIGAR BAND.

upon the floor. I kept this band for years, and eventually stuck it in a book.

It must not be thought for a moment that the Royal family were the only ones who came at that time to Orchard Lea. My father's friends were an extremely varied lot. All sorts and conditions of men and women passed in and out of our doorway. Every week-end there was somebody, and I used to watch them arrive from my top-floor window and wonder if they were going to be casual or kind.

There were two Catholic priests I remember in particular. Two inseparable friends they were, and the youngest of them, Charlie Williamson by name, or "Chat," as he was known, had been at Eton with my father. When I first saw Chat he had a beautiful face, and wonderful deep-set eyes. His voice was soft and modulated and he had a delicious and rather

delicate humour. Father McCall was just a darling old bundle to us, but he was not really old at all when we first knew him, it was just his ways, and the funny shuffling walk he had on the flattest and largest of feet. I used to watch them both pacing the lawn with their Prayer Books in their hands, and I was a little in awe of these two black figures, with their clean-shaven faces and closely cropped hair. Later in life I knew Chat very well, and we used to go for long walks together in Scotland, and what we called "mangle." Mangling meant discussing everyone and everything, ridding ourselves of petty irritations, and talking ourselves out of a bad mood into a good one. When I come to retrace those walks I realize that Chat gave me a lot of useful and excellent advice. He was humorous and kindly and had infinite charm, and he was able to correct a fault without seeming to criticize at all.

A mixture of confused ideas surrounded us at that time. Politicians, priests, artists and musicians; we listened to them all, and I daresay gleaned a little knowledge from each one of them. I cannot truthfully say that I learned anything substantial from their intellectual intercourse, but the one thing it taught me was the sense of observation. It forced me to study character and to read people more by what I saw and sensed than by what I actually heard them saying. 'This strange power of being able to read people, or rather, sense human beings, has grown upon me, and now I have only to be in a room full of people and I know—I can feel—what some of those people are like. I have been told by a soothsayer of the East, that I have the rare and uncommon attribute of being possessed of a seventh sense, which enables me to feel what people are thinking and what they are like so vividly that he advised me, this soothsayer, not to go too often amongst those whom I instinctively disliked or mistrusted. "Because," he said, "if you do, it will make great harm of your health." Of course as a child I did not realize there was anything peculiar about my attentive watchfulness of my parents' varied friends. I only knew that I took violent likes and dislikes, and that I could love or hate a man or a woman across a dining-table without having said a single word to them.

Then a new heaven opened its doors to me. We were taken to a theatre. We had, of course, been already to the circus, but

one day Oliver thought he would try and stand upright on the saddle of his rocking-horse. Of course he fell off, and as ill-luck would have it, broke his arm. So circuses became things of the past, and theatres took their place.

Seymour Hicks was in the first play that I saw. Seymour Hicks, young, slim and good-looking, singing "Her Golden Hair Was Hanging Down Her back." We went to the *Geisha* innumerable times because my parents knew Marie Tempest, Hayden Coffin and Letty Lind extremely well. How pretty she was, this Letty Lind, and how beautifully she danced. She was so light and gay, a baby really in body and in mind. Letty never seemed to mature, she was just a little bit of sunshine that dazzled and bewitched the eyes. Her life was not an easy one, and she had a complicated course to steer, but she managed it somehow, with her timid little voice and her crooked smile, dancing her way across a tangled life so lightly that she never got confused.

Doll was devoted to Letty, and wanted to run away and join up with her on the stage. Doll was always so drastic and sweeping in her ideas, and running away to become an actress seemed to her quite an easy and ordinary thing to do. She wrote continually to Letty, begging her to take her because she said she was not happy at home. Of course Letty showed the letter to my parents—what else was she to do—and that was the last Doll and I saw of her for many years. I knew a little of what was going on from scraps of conversation I overheard. I am afraid at that time I did not think there was anything wrong in listening at doors; indeed, most of my ear-aches were probably far more due to that than adenoids. By gluing myself to the drawing-room keyhole I discovered why it was that we no longer were allowed to see Letty Lind.

"Oh, Doll, how could you?" I said to my adventurous sister.

"How could I what?"

"Say you would run away," I gasped, thrilled with self-importance at being so well informed. "Letty showed them your letters."

We always referred to our parents as "THEM," as if they were gorgons of suppression waiting to administer some fearful torture to their brood.

Doll sneered. "Letty is a little fool," she said, "and you've been listening at doors."

"But you wouldn't really have run away," I whispered. "Not when it came to the point."

She shrugged her shoulders. "You just wait and see," she said, and resumed her gloomy nibble of nails and staring in the fire.

Doll was always threatening to run away after that. It was a kind of aggrieved mental picture she had of herself living unappreciated and misunderstood. I had it too, in a way, but I was far too much of a coward to even dream of leaving the home that sheltered me so well. I suppose there is hardly a child in the world who does not at some time or other think herself or himself unappreciated.

The boys had begun to go to Eton by this time; little tiny figures in top hats far too large for them. Neither of them really cared for games, so Maurice was in the Boats, what is called a "wet bob." Oh, those awful fourths of June. The playing fields and the heat and the crowds, the shy ashamed looks of the boys whose parents were too showy, the quick examination of their clothes to see if they were better or worse dressed than the other chaps' relations. Precocious and abominable small sisters hanging on their brothers' arms and making "googoo" eyes at their brothers' pals, the mockery of watching the cricket that none of us understood. Not until night fell did all these sons and mothers and fathers and sisters become natural, and then it was only under the influence of a common delight the whole crowd could partake in—the famous fireworks of the fourth of June. Parents and progeny could relax and be themselves. They could shout and laugh and clap without being stared at. When Maurice went by in his boat and his colours, and we saw his round, red face lit up by the many flares, then, and only then, did we get a certain thrill, and a gladness that this boy belonged to us. But, when we would look round for Oliver we would find that he had gone. Gone off alone to his own friends and his own dreams, a mysterious brown-eyed boy who seemed to belong apart. A dreamer, half-poet, half-child, who, as I did, wanted to climb a ladder to the stars.

There are certain people one may meet during a lifetime,

perhaps once only, and yet the memory of that person remains more vivid, maybe, and more outstanding than some friend one has known for many years. The Emperor of Germany is such a memory, and such a man. I only met him for a fleeting moment, yet to-day if I close my eyes I can hear the tone of the strange guttural voice, and see the quick activity and intense aliveness of his face.

The manner of my seeing him was this. He was out shooting in Windsor Park with the late King George, who was at that time Prince of Wales. It was a pheasant drive and the keepers were all dressed up in their green velvet coats. Doll and I and Miss Harvey bicycled there from Orchard Lea, and followed the pheasant drive as best we could from the road. We could see them all perfectly because they were walking quite close to us, and if ever they did venture further into the park we concealed our bicycles behind a tree and followed on foot. The Kaiser wore a short black cloak and a small hat with a feather at the side of it. He had two loaders who stood close behind him, and he used his gun with one arm.

The late King George was a wonderful shot, but the Kaiser was even better. He very rarely missed, and he never wounded. The rapidity with which he handed back one gun and received another was amazing, and all the time we could hear his voice keeping up an animated conversation with those that were beside him. He was in what appeared to be an extremely jocular mood. This was a morning after his own heart, it was spectacular. He was undoubtedly the central figure. He was occupied at a sport at which he had no equal, and his whole being responded to the fineness of the day and the glory of the occasion.

When the pheasant drive was over and hundreds of birds lay stretched upon the grass, one of the Court dragged Doll and myself forward to be presented. We were dirty and hot and untidy, but the Kaiser, who was a great friend of my father's at that time, was interested, if not amused, to think that these two dishevelled objects were actually his daughters. Doll, being the eldest and obviously least shy, became the target of a bombardment of questions, whilst I stood first on one leg and then on the

other, staring at this remarkable man. There was something extraordinarily disturbing about his personality. His eyes had a wild and restless look, he gave an impression of vivid un-repose, his volubility seemed to be of a highly nervous quality, as if he was quite incapable of restraining the torrent of thoughts and of words. What he was saying was naturally the unimportant and trivial things that a man in his position would say to a couple of extremely awkward children, but young as I was, I could feel that here was a force so strong it could not, and would not, be ignored.

I saw him again much later when he was surrounded by a group of splendid young Germans, and he laid a wreath upon Queen Victoria's tomb. He did it with the utmost grace and dignity, he was so aware of the importance of being watched. He never missed the opportunity of a fine phrase, or of a great gesture. At the late King's Coronation the Kaiser and the Crown Prince were given an ovation by the crowd. They were showmen, these two, and their salutes and their smiles and their bows were indeed far-reaching; they knew the value of effect. Wherever they went it was amidst the thunder of applause. The public, that so fond and fickle a body of mankind, was at their feet.

When I was between nine and ten years old, I fell in love, and my whole life seemed to alter from careless childhood to a kind of awareness that I was growing up. The object of my affection was a married man, but that held no importance to me, neither did it lessen my desire. He must have been nearing forty when I first knew him, but again that made no difference. All I knew was that I loved him, that if he came into the house my legs were like cotton wool, and if he so much as addressed a word to me, the blood would rush to my face and nose in scarlet confusion.

He was one of my father's oldest and best friends, this man I loved. His name was Lord Binning, and he was in Command of the Blues. I used to go to the Knightsbridge Barracks and stand for hours on the chance that he would come

out. Once I saw him through the barrack-room window, and I clung to the railings like a barnacle glued to the side of a ship. "Oh, God, let him see me," I prayed fervently, as if it were possible that he could single out of all those watching people one infatuated child with a flaming nose.

It is rather difficult for me to explain now what exactly it was about him that appealed to me; the mixture of soldiering and music, the fact that he had the blackest of hair, and the softest of brown eyes. He had an abrupt way of speaking, but he loved all children. He had three of his own, two boys and one little girl.

He was very fond of my mother, and this infuriated me. They used to be a lot together at the piano, whilst I would sit somewhere where I could see him, and glower at my mother. He had an enormous Jaeger overcoat I adored, and I used to snuggle myself down in it and pretend that it was mine. Once I went up to stay with him and his beautiful wife in Scotland. He had a lovely place near Kelso called Mellerstain. That visit was the end of my little love affair. Everything I did and said was wrong. I fell over furniture every time I moved. I got in the way whenever they went shooting, if he spoke to me I was incapable of forming a reply. In bed I thought of wonderful things I might have said to him, but when the morning came dumb madness descended upon me once more. He used to look at me with his funny monkey face puckered up as much as to say: "What on earth is the matter with the child?" and then he would turn away again and forget all about me.

"What a pity you aren't my godchild," he said once. "I seem to know you better than Maurice, and it would have been fun, wouldn't it?" Fun! It would have been Heaven, and once more Maurice became the unconscious victim of my envy.

George Binning never knew how much he meant to me. Most children have a hero they must worship, and he was mine. As far as I was concerned he ennobled the world I lived in, in fact, just at that time he was my world. Of course later on I had other loves, such as Robert Loraine in *The Great Ruby*, George Alexander and Seymour Hicks, but no one ever came anywhere near George Binning. Time cannot wear away ■

child's romance, because it is the foundation-stone of adolescence. I think it was this early love-affair of mine that altered my entire nature. It made me dwell more and more upon myself and my shortcomings. I looked at myself day after day in the mirror and wondered what I was to do. My ambition was to get married and to have as many children as I could, but I saw no possible means of accomplishing this feat. No one was going to love me for my looks, that was evident; what, then, was there in me that could attract a husband? In vain I searched within myself, and found no answer.

When I was thirteen I became filled with morbid fears. I suppose as far as looks were concerned I was at my worst. We had a cook at Orchard Lea, a Mrs. Bell, who made just the sort of food that could not be resisted. Her coffee and whipped cream, her little rolls, her "spotted dog" and her lemon blanch-mange; unforgettable even though they were consumed some forty years ago. Mrs. Bell was extremely violent tempered, and she would often throw things at us to remove us from the kitchen, but there were lovely days when we scraped the scum from the edges of a blackberry jam pan, and sucked it off our fingers. Wonderful moments when she allowed us to pluck some of the currents from the "spotted dog." I was greedy and I ate too much, and it made me fall into a kind of bilious despair I could not shake off. There was no one to console me, no one I could properly confide in. Doll seemed so apart, my parents I hardly ever saw, Miss Harvey would not have understood. There was no one. Then I discovered Oliver, and it was as if a new brother had suddenly arrived into the house. I do not remember why or how we actually emerged from ordinary family life into a friendship, but I can say this, Oliver was the best, if not the only real friend I had at that time. Of course there was Teddie Seymour, but he was too gay and happy-go-lucky to go very deeply into any matter that did not directly concern himself. Besides, it did not occur to him that a fat little girl who fetched and carried for him could possibly have any ideas in her head that mattered.

Oliver had developed in sympathy and charm. He had had a few youthful love affairs of his own, so he understood. He wrote rather beautiful poetry and would read it aloud to me.

One poem was all about me, and I was extremely proud of it.

"You are a child imagination stirs
To depths of feeling unbelieved, unknown . . ."

it began, but those are the only lines I can remember, and the only copy I ever had has fallen to pieces bit by bit.

Oliver and I would sit on the garden wall and discuss things. We did not feel awkward or shy of one another, and he would talk about himself and all the wonderful things he wanted to do. He believed in family tradition, and ancestral homes, and generations following in one another's footsteps. He was the only one of us who really had this feeling deep in his blood. He collected photographs and Press cuttings about my father and grandfather and stuck them in a book. Serious he was about it all and intensely sincere. It was not always easy to arrange these talks. Maurice was always thrusting his round inquisitive face into our hiding-place, and Doll always wanted to know where we had been. We could reach the back yard wall by climbing a small mound and crawling past a walnut tree, through a tangle of dry rhododendrons. Once we got there, we were concealed from the main garden, so we could sit and talk and munch walnuts to our hearts' content. I shall always remember Oliver as he was then, and although our paths have divided and led us to such separate lives, there is a special link with him that neither space nor time can break.

Sometimes Wilfred Sheridan would join our discussion; one of the most beautiful boys I have ever seen, which is not surprising considering he came of that famous family whose beauty was renowned. Spoilt, and a little affected, but genuine, that was what Wilfred was like at that time, and really one almost forgot what he was saying in the pleasure of watching his face.

My father and mother frightened me. If only I had known my mother then as I learned to know her later, she would have been the one I would have turned to. My father seemed to live in another world with her, and with Maurice; a world the rest of us were not intended to enter. It was mostly my mother's treatment of him that made us so conscious of this "difference."

For instance, she would not settle down in a room until she had discovered which chair he wished to sit in—she never went anywhere, or accepted an invitation without consulting him. When she ordered the meals she would take the book into him and let him order what he liked, irrespective of anyone else. All her letters were shown to him, both the ones she wrote and the ones she received. They were so profoundly one, it seemed a sacrilege to break in upon their devotion. Is it surprising, then, that we were afraid to approach too near; is it surprising that we felt sometimes a little unwanted and alone. My mother was sweet to us always, and attentive, but all the time we could see she was listening for him, and waiting for him. Her affection for us was a detached affection, it was an effort to tear her thoughts from his. Only Maurice could venture near, and if ever we wanted anything, we would always send Maurice to ask for it, because we knew we should get it without comment.

I grew and grew in morbidity. I spent day after day reading in my room, trying to pierce through the dullness of my brain and learn something. I could read French fluently at that time, a succession of French and Swiss maids having beaten the language into my brain. I must say, when things do eventually get into my brain they find it equally hard to get out again. I immersed myself in Zola, de Maupassant and Poe. All the ugliness there is in life rose out of those pages, and enveloped me. I saw no reason for living if things were as Zola made them out to be; there was no reason for living if there were such happenings as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. I suppose what I was really suffering from was a form of suppression, the most deadly menace for girls whose lives are not sufficiently filled. Some parents believe that school is a cure for this. My father and mother were not of this opinion, and I am now convinced that they were right. From thirteen to seventeen is a critical age for any girl, wherever she is; the turn of the wheel from childhood to adolescence.

Doll and I were continually alone. We lived at the top of this large and lovely house, too terrified to venture along the ill-lit corridors with their occasional lamp, and down the cedarwood staircase to the rooms below. I never can smell cedarwood now without remembering Orchard Lea, with its

tapestried walls and its oak hall, and the lattice windows that rattled in the wind. I could feel my way blindfolded to the drawing-room where the French books were kept, and draw Zola and de Maupassant from out of their cedarwood shelves. I could find my way to my own room, up a corkscrew staircase, in those days; my room, with the high bed set in the alcove and the little sofa I bought with my own money. Shadows now, but real shadows, that make memories worth while.

My father was at the Office of Works. He used to go up to London every morning by the 9.30 train from Windsor, and return by the 6.30 train at night. He would drive into Windsor in a two-wheeled buggy, and come back in my mother's closed carriage at night. Very often she went with him, but if she did not go with him she would never let him leave in the morning without seeing him off from the front gate, and she would wait until he reached the corner of the road so that she could wave to him again. She believed in these little touches in life, and I think she was right. What a difference a look back may mean, sometimes, or an unexpected smile.

In the winter there were terrible fogs and the whole house was uneasy until my father returned. I can remember crouching on the stairs with my face flattened against the window, gazing out into an impenetrable yellow veil. From my top-storey room I could see the turn of the road, and I could hear the sound of the horses trotting from a long way off. Sometimes the carriage lamps were just visible, like small red coals in a smoke-bound fire. Sometimes my father and mother were obliged to walk in front of the carriage, peering with a lantern, for four and a half miles. If my father was alone in one of these fogs my mother would move restlessly about the house in a fever of fear, and this fear would spread itself like a cloak over us all, so that we dreaded the winter months even while it was still summer.

No 1 Tilney Street was let, or we would have gone there, and our winters would have been far happier. This watching and waiting and anxiety was not good for any of us, it brought shadows into a house where there should have been nothing else but sun.

I remember one summer's day when I was watching for the carriage, I looked down and saw what must have been an almost phenomenal sight. One of our cats had built a nest in the ivy on the wall, and there were three kittens curled up in it. We found out that she reached it by climbing carefully, from the window, but it is the first and only time I have ever heard of a cat in a nest, fifteen or more feet from the ground. When the kittens grew older she carried them up the wall in her mouth and left them in a drawer. What kind of a cat was she, I wonder, who had the instincts of a bird.

I do not remember what reason it was that made me definitely make up my mind that death was the simplest way out for me, but let it suffice that the idea buried itself into my brain like a fungus growth and would not leave me alone. I was too much of a coward to do anything violent, and besides, I was in that state of mental peculiarity when the desire for a bedside scene and the weeping remorse of those standing round me grew and grew into a vivid picture that very soon became an obsession. But how was I to make myself ill; what form of disease could I contract? I was fat, with scarlet cheeks, and in the highest state of bodily vigour. What hope had I making myself ill? Strangely enough, it was my parents themselves who eventually gave me the idea.

It was during lunch time, and the conversation had steered its course towards illnesses and death. My father became expansive on the subject of diet and proper feeding. I was listening, of course, with all my ears, eager to learn something new.

"Ptomaine poisoning," said my father, "is the thing I am afraid of. Decomposed food—meat, fish, cheese, even stale bread—but worst of all tinned food. It ought not to be allowed."

"The moment a tin is opened," agreed my mother, "it becomes a menace. I never would dream of having such a thing in the house."

"Tinned food." How those words rang in my ears.

Everywhere I went a voice seemed to say: "Tinned food. That's the thing. Tinned food. Tinned food." When I slept I dreamed of tins of all sizes and shapes—salmon, sardine, sprats, anchovies and paste—all in a line along the bed rail.

Now Doll and I were given pocket money in those days, and we used to drive into Windsor in a little pony trap and spend it on odds and ends. It was on one of these excursions into Windsor that I slipped into a grocer's shop and purchased a small tin of sardines. It cost me ninepence. I remember that so well because I only had a shilling to spend, and I rather grudged the price.

I took the tin home with me, smuggled it upstairs to my room, opened it, and concealed it on the top of my hanging cupboard where I knew it would never be found. Then, for a whole week I went about gloating in the new rôle of a martyr. Every time I looked at my parents I said to myself: "You'll be sorry when I'm gone." What they were to be sorry for I had no idea, as they had never been anything else really but wonderful to me. Every day when I was out walking with Doll, I longed to cry out to her: "You won't look so self-possessed, my young lady, when your only sister is dead. You won't go hopping along like that. You'll be sorry—sorry you didn't play with me more, and let me into your life."

And so I nursed my imaginary grievance as I waited for my tin to ferment. At the end of the seventh day I clambered up on to a chair with my heart beating, and took down my precious tin. It is not difficult to imagine what a tin of sardines will look like after it has been kept open for a week, nor how it will smell. There was a kind of grey fur all over the sardines for about half an inch above the bent-back lid; ■ hideous grey fur that exuded staleness, that was rotten through and through. I waited until night time, and then with a glass of water I managed to wash the sardines, fur and all down my throat. Then I brushed my hair carefully, put on my prettiest nightdress, asked God to forgive me, and laid me down with a will to die. But not to die easily. Oh no, that would not have fitted into my mood. Nausea, vomiting, feverishness, muscular cramp and then

prostration—those were the symptoms my unhappy and regretful parents would be told of in the morning.

When morning came, not even a pain. No nausea, no headache. Never had I risen from my bed feeling healthier or heartier in body. I went down to breakfast. My father commented on the excellence of my appearance. I had thrived on the grey-green fur and sardines. My first attempt at suicide had failed.

But I was not going to be outdone by this first failure. If ptomaine was of no use, there must be other ways. What did people die of? Inflammation of the lungs—pneumonia—that was the thing. Why had I not thought of it before? It was more romantic after all than poisoned fish.

The time of year was advantageous. It was mid-winter, and one of those real winters with snow everywhere. Outside my bedroom there was a turret with plenty of room. I grew flowers in boxes there in the summer, and would sit out there and read, but at this time the leads were covered inches thick in snow.

I waited until everyone was asleep, and then I clambered out of my window and lay naked in the snow all night. At first the agony was almost more than I could bear, but after a little while the snow felt warm and friendly; there were a thousand stars in the sky and it seemed as if I was floating midway between heaven and earth. I dozed peacefully and then fell asleep.

The next morning, not even a cold, not a suspicion of a chill. I felt magnificent, with an appetite that could not be appeased. "Perhaps it's too soon," I said to myself, "the attack may come on later." I waited for three or four days, expecting to shiver, hoping for pains in the chest and a rising temperature. But, no; I had to confess to myself that I had seldom felt better in my life. My second attempt at suicide had failed.

Once more I made up my mind I would try, but only once. I would not do anything violent because I did not want to be deprived of that heartrending death-bed scene of weeping relations. I began to look up diseases in a medical dictionary I found. It seemed to me astonishing that out of all these illnesses I should not be able to contract one of them. I

searched and searched the pages of that book. I read and re-read the symptoms of complaints from beginning to end. My final selection was consumption. I pictured myself in diaphanous *négligé* wasting away before my parents' eyes, coughing blood. Doctors, nurses, the family and staff standing by my bedside, weeping over my premature demise. It would be a prolonged and touching end to my existence. The idea of it appealed to me, although I had no idea how to begin.

I gathered together some of my long black stockings and and some towels. I soaked them in the bath, then, binding them round me, the dripping stockings round my throat and the drenched towels round my lungs, I crawled into bed, and in a state of steaming anticipation I waited until dawn.

No sore throat, no shivering fits, no temperature. I was not even hoarse. My third attempt at suicide had failed.

I gave it up after that, for I was even then something of a fatalist. I remember so well the next evening when I said my prayers, adding these words to them: "It's all right, God, I won't try again. You win!"

Since it was evident that I was not destined to die, I made up my mind I would live flamingly and electrify the world. I began to educate myself with concentrated fervour. I would show my parents that my brain, though slow, was solid. I listened carefully to the conversations round me. I studied history books and maps. I read and re-read the pages of my Bible, because the words of the Testament were like music in my ears. I must confess that my self-instruction seemed not to have the slightest effect upon my general demeanour. I still remained in my chair at meal times like a suet pudding glued to the side of a plate. My face was still devoid of all expression, and my adenoids still ached. But inwardly I felt re-born. I gained confidence in myself and this reading was like a strong tonic to me. I could feel my thoughts stirring and stretching and taking hold. Of course, all this reading was unhealthy in a way, because I was neglecting my body to give more nourishment to my brain. I did not go out enough. I abandoned exercise, my face lost colour and there were spots under my skin. My parents said that I had reached the spotty age and did not question me, so that I was able to continue my

reading until my body became soft and slothful and my eyes sunk into my head.

The books that I read were of an unfortunate selection. They were cruel and embittering, and their unsavoury enlightenment made me serious and sad beyond my age. But it was worth it if in the end I could prove to my parents that there was something in me after all. I wanted my father to be proud of me. I wanted him to see that I really was trying to climb the ladder of his intelligence, that seemed to me to touch the stars. Of course I did not understand half that I was reading; the words and sentences were a sort of clamour in my brain, stirring my intelligence and lightening the burden of grey matter in my head. I tore down the fruits of knowledge, and because I was too young to appreciate their worth they withered and grew rotten in my hands. My mind became perverted and upset. Ugliness surrounded me. The world was made up of wild beasts, not human beings, and it frightened and appalled me.

And so I buried myself deeper and deeper in my room on the top floor. I sat amongst my books and my disturbing dreams. And thus it was that I passed unhealthily from childhood into adolescence.

PART II

ADOLESCENCE

MY early days of adolescence were darkened by the Boer War, and the fact that my beloved Teddie Seymour was obliged to go to it. He was wounded in the foot and came back to Orchard Lea hobbling with a stick, and wearing an enormous carpet slipper we nicknamed "Kruger."

I remember collecting pictures of all the famous soldiers who were taking part in this war—Kitchener, French, Baden-Powell, Methuen, Sir George White, Redvers Buller and Gatacre. They were just faces to me then, just cuttings from the daily papers and glued into a book. I never imagined it could be possible that one day one of them would become my dearest and best friend.

The relief of Mafeking. What a night that was—the songs that were sung, and Kipling's "Absent-minded Beggar" recited from every stage and every platform. "Dolly Gray," "The Honeysuckle and the Bee," and "The Soldiers of the Queen"; even now they give me a thrill when played, and a lump rises in my throat. That most fascinating and charming of composers, Paul Rubens, wrote a recruiting song that put many hundreds into uniform. It is strange how all wars are dated by music more than anything else in the world.

Mafeking night. Not even the Great War has washed away that memory, and many of my age who were out that night have kept a special corner in their hearts for it.

Doll and I were in London, and we went with my father's secretary, Stanley Quick, on the top of a bus to St. Paul's. The crowds were dense beneath us. The bus could only move in spasmodic jerks. Coloured streamers, coloured flags, hooters, peacock's feathers, all thrust into our faces. Everybody yelling. Red faces, suffocating whisky breath every-

where. London gone mad in a kaleidoscope of music and of wine.

We all wore little button portraits of our favourites pinned upon our coats. I was smothered with Kitchener, French, and Baden-Powell. We carried whips of coloured streamers, red, white and blue, and small flags decorated our hats.

Doll was terrified. I can truthfully say that our Mafeking night was ruined on account of her. She screamed to Stanley to take her home. She had completely lost her poise, her self-control had gone. Whistles were blown into her pretty face. Paper was wound about her hair. But, most shaming of all to her was when she was chucked under the chin and asked somewhat crudely for a kiss. She could not, and would not, see that everything being done on that night was but in a spirit of gay abandonment in which there was no harm. I was enjoying myself for one of the few times of my life—in spite of the fact that I had not been chucked under the chin, neither were my kisses in demand—but the crowds excited me. I stood up and thrust my peacock's feather in everybody's face. My coloured streamers were all torn. There was confetti in my hair, but it was Mafeking night and I did not mind. But, alas, Doll sobbed so loudly the crowds themselves began to sympathize. "Take the poor little girl 'ome," one woman shouted to poor Stanley. "You ort to be ashamed of yourself, you ort!" "Bringing the poor little dear out on a night like this," said another. "Disgraceful, I call it." Considering there were new-born babies tossing about in that sea of humanity like little white waves, this last remark seemed unjust and out of place. Nevertheless it drove Stanley from the bus. I was furious, because I wanted to hear the singing outside St. Paul's, but home we went. Stanley arrived at our front door with two yelling young females on his arm, and that was the end of Mafeking night for him and for us.

It was two years after this that Doll was taken suddenly ill. It was all the more startling because up till then there had been no serious sickness in our family. We were at Orchard Lea at the time, but fortunately there was a doctor who lived about a mile and a half away. Dr. Barron knew us all intimately. He had attended to all our childish complaints, vaccinated us, and was the darling family doctor that every household

delights in. But he was getting old and he did not feel capable of dealing with the sudden and serious illness that had befallen Doll, so he sent his son in his place. Now Doll and I had had our eyes on this young man for quite a long time and we used to bicycle continually as far as the surgery in the hopes of catching a glimpse of him. There was something mysteriously fascinating about him, with his full white face and prematurely greying hair. He had a soft slow way of speaking, and his rather prominent blue eyes were heavy-lidded, hooded, almost as if to shut in the coldness of his stare. The thing I remember about him most was that he had really beautiful hands. Even in those days hands were of the utmost importance to me. When I looked at people for the first time, it was always their hands I remembered. I do still; the shape of their fingers and the lower half of a face tell me more than anything anyone may ever say or do.

Young Dr. Barron, or the "Jüngling" as we very quickly christened him, pronounced my poor sister dangerously ill. Acute appendicitis, probably an abscess. My parents must send for a specialist at once.

It was the early days of appendicitis but there was one man already famous for his operations. Sir Frederick Treves was hastily summoned from London. There was not the easy means of transport that there is now, and he was obliged to wait for a convenient train and then be driven from Windsor by carriage. The time seemed endless before he arrived, and my mother was in an agony of suspense and despair. I could not help thinking to myself: "This is what I wanted; anxious faces, whispering, the concentration of the whole house upon this illness. Why, oh why, could it not have been mine?"

Sir Frederick Treves was only just in time. There was an abscess which burst as he began to operate. For forty-eight hours my sister hung between life and death, even Sir Frederick himself could hold out little hope that she would live.

But, owing to his amazing skill, he managed to pull her through. It seemed so tragic that this man, who saved so many lives from this particular disease, should have lost his own daughter whose death he never ceased to mourn. I think it was this illness of Doll's that drew a kind of veil from my eyes and made me see how really fond I was of her. When

you are well and healthy and you live amongst others who are equally well, you do not trouble to be kind to them, or notice really in what way you are treating them. It is only when they are ill—dying possibly—that you think back on all the wrongs that you have done them, and the cruel things you may have said, the spoken word from which there is no drawing back. How many of us have said to ourselves when someone we love has died: "I wish I had not told him that—or this," and it has haunted us that while dying our friend may have remembered just that one thing that we regret.

So it was with me when Doll was ill. I remembered everything that I had done and said to hurt her. Little unimportant quarrels, so harmless when she was well, rose now like threatening clouds before me, engulfing me with their persistent reproach. I would sit by her bedside waiting to help in any way I could. She was so wonderful through it all. Week after week she lay with a tube in her side draining the poison from out of her, yet she never once complained. She was always ready to laugh and talk, and she used to play practical jokes on the Jüngling. Sometimes when he came to dress her wound, he would find her all decorated up with an enormous ribbon tied round her naked body like a chocolate-box. If he hurt her taking out the tube, she would wind her fingers into his thick grey hair and pull so hard that he seemed to be suffering about as much as she was. Yet they both laughed over it. He was so genuinely fond of his young patient, and so sincerely sorry for her. But I would watch their friendship, torn between devotion to her and a consuming jealousy that it was she who was ill and not I.

Doll had a nurse from Princess Christian's Home in Windsor. Her name was Marion Mortimer. She had a bright and pretty face with very rosy cheeks, and she was about the most competent nurse they had at the Home at that time. We all became hopelessly dependent on her. We felt if she was out of our sight for one moment something awful would happen to Doll.

In the excitement and rush of this sudden operation they forgot to cut Doll's hair, which hung almost to her waist. Nurse Mortimer did her best to brush and comb it, but Doll could not move off her back, so it was difficult. When at

last she could be raised a little what a sight met our eyes. Her beautiful auburn hair was matted, not loosely, but a wedge of cotton wool, gauze and hair. It looked every bit like the leavings of a vacuum cleaner; there was not even room to force the scissors between this tangle and her head. Poor Nurse Mortimer's rosy cheeks grew redder and redder, as day after day she hooked at this hair with a comb. Doll cried with weakness and rage, and I cried in sympathy with her. Hair-dressing hours were spent in a torrent of tears—the modern girls with their little cropped heads have certainly something to be thankful for when they are ill.

When Doll was well again we went down to Folkestone—Doll, Nurse Mortimer and I. She could not walk even then, but was carried to the train in a carrying chair. The two most vivid things I remember at Folkestone were, that a man had an epileptic fit on the Leas, close by to where we were sitting, which enthralled me; and that Nurse Mortimer and I had a rival flirtation with the band leader on the pier.

Doll and I became the very best of friends, due, I feel sure, to the shock of this sudden illness. As a matter of fact these months of suffering had upset her far more than any of us at that time ever imagined. It seemed to have aged her, and yet in a way arrested her development. It was a kind of gap in her growing, an intermission that could not be strung together.

When Nurse Mortimer left us we thought it would be the end of the world. My father was overworked and preoccupied, and the one thing my mother dreaded to face was the slightest responsibility. She was nervous and easily upset. She would watch Doll with agonized eyes, always imagining her looking ill, or being ill, and she was helpless with no one to turn to and consult. When at last Doll did have an attack of ordinary sickness it broke my mother's nerve. "I can't do it," she told my father. "Nurse Mortimer must come back again."

My father went in to see Princess Christian, and forthwith the arrangement was made that Nurse Mortimer should leave the Home and come permanently to us. Whether my parents did rightly or wrongly in this, it is difficult now to say. Nurse Mortimer might have risen high in her profession. On the other hand, we endeavoured to fill her life with compensating

interests. I often think she must have missed the surroundings she was used to, in that quiet country house with us, but she met people of interest, she went everywhere with us. Maybe we balanced the scales of her happiness. But it is a dangerous experiment to take a figure from its frame and re-set it into something new. Years afterwards, even when she no longer lived with us, whenever any of us were really ill she was always ready to return, and ever cheerful and helpful when we needed her.

I think I am correct in asserting that my father was one of the very first to have a motor car in London. To be exact, the number plate only reached A.60, so you can imagine how scarce cars were in London at that time. It was an electric brougham and extraordinarily easy to drive; so easy, in fact, that my father saw no reason in not making use of one of the under-footmen as chauffeur. He was a slow and silly-faced boy, utterly unsuited to do anything but open and shut doors and hand round dishes. The traffic of London appalled him. The fact that he was going a little faster than the rest of the vehicles, made him look upon this electrical contrivance as a sort of monster of velocity. Everybody stared at us. We were inordinately proud of our little car. We tried to forget the apprehensive and palpitating under-footman who was conducting us through the crowded streets.

The end came at Albert Gate. It was a day of sales and immense shoppings. My mother and I sallied forth in the car, she a little anxious because my father was not there, and I intent on a ten-shilling piece I had been treasuring for weeks for this occasion. But my mother's anxiety was nothing compared to the stricken horror of the under-footman. The whole world had quite suddenly become too much for him. He had visions of the traffic passing like a mammoth wave over him and the electric brougham. With a cry he dropped the steering-wheel and stood up in his seat. "Stop—stop—stop," he shrieked piteously to the oncoming vehicles, and held up his hands as if in prayer.

Of course they did not stop. How could they? And how could we, since the boy had forgotten to put on the brakes. We sailed serenely into the nearest bus, and remained there. . . . Needless to say it was the final outing of the under-footman, who was forthwith banished to his pantry and his plates.

My father had another kind of car at Orchard Lea. It was an open affair without even a hood. The chauffeur and one passenger could perch in an upright position on a perilously narrow seat that faced the open road at the back. It was Doll's prerogative, being the eldest, to select where she would care to sit and she invariably chose the seat I wanted; this insecure but captivating ledge above the road. The car was run on steam, and all I can remember about it is that we sounded like an over-boiling kettle as we came along, and that Doll looked like Aphrodite Traversing the Heavens upon a cloud of steam.

However, it ran us in to Windsor, which was all it was intended to do, and going down High Standing Hill was a glorious sensation because we could shut off the noise and the heat and coast blissfully into the town.

My father purchased a lovely little property in Scotland where we would all go for the holidays. It was a kind of dream place really concealed at the beginning of Callander Village—that so grey and grim little village with its dour stone houses and stiff unwinding street. The house was pink-washed and it was broken up into little towers, and bay lattice windows. Just below the drawing-room window the River Teith rushed by tumbling and playing over the stones in musical abandon; the river I fished in so frequently and never caught more than the trees above, or the tall flowers in the grassy bank. The garden had green lawns and winding paths that ran to the river's edge, and all round and about the estate there was a Roman Camp that had a right of way to the village. On one side there was a little crooked wall-garden laden with fruit, and on the front lawn there was a heathered tump, where my parents afterwards built a little house for me where I could write my books. It was a kind of paradise for us, this place. We could go into the village alone, walk alone, and be alone on the moors for hours. We could walk with

the guns over the heather, and fish along the burn that wound its way down the slopes of Ben Ledi.

We went in tremendously for bicycling in those days, and six of us would sally forth by train, with the bicycles and my mother's tricycle heaped into the van. Usually these days would have an unfortunate beginning. There was trouble about what direction we should go. Maurice always had an idea of what place he wanted, and if Maurice had an idea that did not become a reality his "black devils" would descend upon him and darken his mood for the day. When my father used to announce at breakfast: "We will go here to-day, or there," we did not look at him. We all turned and stared at Maurice, and if we saw the thick brows gathering over his really charming eyes, we knew we were in for one of his moods, and that a procession of six silent cyclists would traverse the Scotch roads. I must say my father remained firm over these disputes, although it was evident to us all how much they upset him. It was astonishing to see this brilliant man so utterly dependent on so young a boy. They would pedal side by side, my father gazing wistfully to see if the "black devils" were departing, and we would pedal silently behind them, secretly furious that our day had been spoilt. We used to carry our food with us in little parcels hung to the handlebars—grouse sandwiches, and scones oozing with jam. I nearly always chose the wrong jam, and would glare revengefully at whoever's packet I coveted. It is a strange thing that even now when I go to a restaurant I still order the wrong thing, and still covet what I see being devoured at the table next to me.

Our favourite ride was to take the train to Killin and cycle back through Glen Ogle to Strathyre, where we again embarked by train to Callander. Glen Ogle ran in a steep descent for quite three miles and a half into the little village of Loch Earnhead where there was a wonderful inn and where tea was awaiting us. For three and a half miles we could free-wheel down this hill, and it was a glorious sensation gaining speed and rushing through the green moors and grey rocks. Sometimes we would miss a large stone by a hair's-breadth, sometimes a sheep would leisurely make up its mind to move into our way. It was not perhaps so pleasant for my mother on her tricycle. She could not twist in and out as we could. Her machine was

cumbersome and likely to upset. She had very small hands and wrists that got tired on the brakes, and it definitely spoilt her fun. She was anxious and timid, but she loved these expeditions more, I think, than we did. She did not like to complain to my father about her brakes in case he would advise her not to come, but he had noticed her difficulties, and so had we, and he discussed with us what we thought could be done.

Eventually someone—I forget now which of us it was, except that I am quite sure it was not I—brought forth an inspiration. We would tie her brakes firmly up with string, so that for the three and a half miles there would be no strain on her at all. She would be able to remain in her saddle and smile round at the scenery; she would be unable to gain speed, so there would be nothing to concern or frighten her.

Off we trooped to Killin to put this idea to the test. Of course, my mother agreed to it. She always had such perfect faith in everyone else but herself. We tied the brakes in an iron grip, so tightly, in fact, that my mother could hardly move the tricycle from the hotel to the top of the hill. We gave her a gigantic push, and started her going, and then we all tore past her shouting and waving and saying we would meet her at Loch Earnhead.

We got to Loch Earnhead, leaned our bicycles against the hotel wall, and looked up the road for my mother. There was no sign of her, but it did not occur to us then that there was anything wrong. It did not make us even uneasy. We just thought that perhaps we had tied the brakes a little too tightly and made her progression slow—that was all. We sat about on the iron benches outside, laughing and talking and longing for tea. But still no signs of my mother. My father began to be restless. "What on earth can have happened to Nellie?" he kept repeating, glaring round at us all as if it was our fault that she was missing. We none of us dared make any suggestion, but I am sure we all thought the same. Something must have gone wrong with the brakes.

Then we saw her, and she seemed at first to be all right and coming at a dignified and even pace. But round and about her ankles we noticed little puffs of smoke, which lingered in the air after she had left.

As she drew nearer the puffs of smoke increased, and then we

knew to what awful lengths our inspiration had led us. We had tied the brakes too tightly. My poor mother was on fire. When she drew up on the flat road by the inn her face was scarlet, but wonderful to relate she was still smiling. The smell of burning tyres was appalling. "It got hotter and hotter," she said, "and I couldn't stop. But it *was* a good idea."

Her ankles were singed and the edge of her skirt was ruined. I have often tried to imagine what her feelings must have been as she found herself alone in the glen on a fearsome machine that was on fire.

The Roman Camp was the most lovely of all places. It had everything. It seemed to encompass all the beauties that a home should have. It was the sanctuary for all my sadness, and I was always happy there. I would start off in the morning with a sandwich and a bottle of beer and I would walk for miles up Ben Ledi fishing for brown trout in the burn. They were not large trout, but they were glorious to catch; or sometimes I would just lie flat on a rock and watch them playing about in a shallow pool below. It was so free and open and clean. I could forget de Maupassant and Zola, and my own disturbed existence. I could breathe fresh air into my body and fresh thoughts into my mind.

There was a little black wooden hut on the edge of Loch Lubnaig where we used often to meet and have lunch. My father, amongst his many other qualifications, was an excellent cook. He would grill up the cold grouse with bacon, and scramble eggs, and would never allow anyone else near the stove except himself. Doll and I acted as maids, and laid the table and washed up when everything was over. Sometimes my little brown trout were fried, but I was never quite sure if I enjoyed them or not. I loved the taste of them, but I did not feel quite easy in my mind. I could not help remembering them as I had seen them last, playing about in the sunlit, shallow pool.

My father built a little chapel on one of the lower slopes of Ben Ledi. It stood upon a grass promontory and commanded a perfect view of Loch Lubnaig below. The idea was that we should be cremated after death and laid to rest within these simple walls. There were little niches, six in number, waiting for our urns. I only went into it once because my

father held the key, but I used to sit by it when I went fishing, and eat my sandwiches contentedly against its walls. It gave me no feeling of fear or awe, but rather did it soothe me. It fitted into the place that I loved most, peaceful and non-combative. It made me lose a little of my morbid self-analysis. This paradise in Perthshire made me glad I was alive instead of miserably wishing I was dead.

It was while I was at the Roman Camp that I saw two ghosts; saw them as surely and certainly as if they had been two human beings coming to call upon us. It was early evening; one of those long grey evenings that linger from sundown to night. I had dressed early for dinner and was sitting in the little hall close to a window from which I could see purple and scarlet and white phloxes, gathered against a grey gravel path that led along the side of the house. I was not thinking of anything particular, but just leaning back lazing and looking at the departing day, when suddenly I saw two monks coming slowly along the crooked path. They were walking side by side, their hands folded in their wide sleeves, and they had cowls upon their heads and ropes about their waists. I was rather annoyed at their intrusion at such an hour, and wished they had chosen any time but this to do their begging, so I went to the front door determined to get rid of them as quickly as I could. But—when I opened the front door there were no monks. I went up and down the little path and round and about the house, but there was no one there. On thinking it over I remembered that although the window had been open as they passed, I had not heard the slightest sound of their walking feet upon the gravel.

Of course the village people said that there was some story of the house having belonged to monks once upon a time, and it was well known that the place was haunted by them, but it seemed a little fantastic to us since they had never spoken of it before. My parents laughed at me and my "spooks," and said it must have been Robert the gardener on his round to stoke up the heaters. Even I myself began to disbelieve that I had seen them. But a year later my father also saw them at the same time and along the same pathway by the house, and it was not until he built a little chapel on to the house that spread across this path that the monks' ghosts were laid to rest.

Once during the fishing season Mr. Amery came up to visit us, and he and I went out for the day together to see what we could catch. The vivid thing I can remember of that day is Mr. Amery ■ he carried me waist-deep in water across the burn. He was very proud of that achievement, and well might he have been, for I was extremely buxom at that time, and in my fishing boots I must have been no small weight.

We used to drive across the hills to see Lord Haldane, who lived at Auchterrader. I liked Lord Haldane; he reminded me of a smiling mandarin. His voice was purring and urbane. He hardly ever made a gesture. He was smooth and sleek and unhurried. A dreamer and philosopher whose dreams were ambitions, but whose science of nature bore him peacefully through the turmoil of his final course of life.

It was during this time that I found, as it were, my real refuge and why it was that I was forever dreaming uncreative dreams and seeking happiness in make-believe. I knew at last for what reason I had been reading shelf by shelf, stuffing myself with information I was unable to express. Everybody I met and everything I saw would form itself into an adventure or a story in my mind. I was not observant. I trusted too much to my sense of feeling—I could feel personalities without exactly seeing them. My eyes told me that he or she was nice to look upon, but my senses drove me below that outer beauty to what they were, and why they were, and the story that hung round them. The lower half of a human face is where the story lies—the mouth and the chin, and the lines that they themselves have formed. Eyes are but deceptive windows that reflect whatever mood you will, but the lips when closed can tell no lies; your whole character is written upon the surface of them.

It was only by chance that I found the solution of what seemed to me ■ useless life. A toss of a coin, the turning over of a leaf maybe, and a whole life is changed as if by magic. I happened to be reading a youthful magazine called *The Girl's Realm*, and I saw therein that a prize was being offered for

■ love story of so many words. The prize was twenty-five pounds—a veritable fortune in my eyes—and I was determined to obtain it. Twenty-five pounds for a story. A love story. It could not be so difficult. Love at so many shillings a line. The idea fascinated me. I did not say anything to my parents, not even to Doll. I wanted, if I won, to give them a surprise. It is extraordinary how confident I felt. I was quite sure that I would win. I even remember planning in my mind everything I would do with the money, and I am sure in my imagination I spent every penny of it over and over again.

I knew very little about love except my adoration for George Binning. I was full of the sickly sentimentality of girls of my age. I called my story "Sweet William." It was my favourite flower at that time. I was pleased with that title—I thought it clever and apt. I could visualize the sort of man who would possess such a name. It made it easy for me to begin.

It was not much of a story, but they awarded me the prize. I shall never forget what I felt like as I opened the letter and the cheque fell into my lap. I read and re-read my story, wondering what quality it contained that others had not. I think what the editor liked about it was the cunning way I had made up the number of words. My hero William was a stammering hero. For every word he made three words, and therefore my story had not dragged itself out into failure. It was my first one and it had not failed. For days and days I carried that cheque against my heart.

But it was not only the money. It had a greater significance than that. For the first time my father became interested in me. I will not say that he did not look upon this literary leap into the dark as an accidental venture that had for some strange reason been a success. And he liked success. Failure in anything annoyed him. He could not see how failure was possible in anyone if sufficient trouble had been taken in whatever they set out to do. "Write some more," he said to me. "Don't lay only one egg and then sit down on it and hatch it. How do you know it isn't addled? The first egg usually is."

I wrote some more, but not for any prize this time. No tempting twenty-five pounds as a bait at the end of my pen.

I just sat down and wrote a short story and I called it "The String of Life." This story eventually found its way into the first book I ever published, but that was long after it had been printed in a magazine. Sentimental, of course, it was; it positively oozed with syrupy romance. It was stilted and selfconscious, and rather smug. Nevertheless the editor accepted it.

I think it is so sad when you are getting old to feel that never again will you ever know what the thrill of achievement means. There are certain things as the years go by you realize are over for ever. You close the door softly on them, but not without regret. You are the same—and yet different. Everything is there, behind that locked door, but the thrill has gone.

My father began to take notice of me. I left all the magazines that held my stories, in conspicuous places about the house so that he should read them. I did so want him to admire me, to look upon me at last as a human being and not as a kind of freak amidst his flock. It is a strange thing about my father and myself that although in later life I feel sure we had a lot in common, I do not think we ever said more to one another than the conventional conversation of every day. I could not express myself when he was near. I was timid and tongue-tied and unable to form words. We seemed to jar on one another and be out of tune. We used to laugh about it sometimes because it was so evident I was not his type.

I continued writing short stories. My typewriter was never still, and each story I wrote seemed to lift a burden from my soul, as if I had rid myself of an emotion or a thought that had been weighing on me. I used to read all that I had written aloud to Doll, who was, I must admit, an enthusiastic listener. That was the wonderful thing about Doll. She was never jealous of my writing. Perhaps she already knew that deep within her she had a talent far more masterly than mine.

Very soon after this Doll was presented at Court. My lovely sister; it makes me so sad to think of her in those early days with, as it seemed to us then, everything before her. My mother was so proud of her. She thought Doll was sure to be a society success. Indeed for a little while she was, and it was her own fault that she lost it. She was proud and resentful,

and I have no doubt heartily despised this "coming out" business, and parading of her charms. She would go to a party prepared as if for battle, her soft mouth set, and her large eyes cold and unkind. When she returned from these parties she would ■ a rule come storming into my room and wake me. "I hate them. I hate them," she would cry, peeling off her long white gloves and throwing them across the floor. "What's it all for anyway?" My heart would sink because I knew it would not be long before I myself was thrown into this vortex of social delight.

"Isn't it fun?" I would ask her. "The dancing and all that. It must be fun—really."

"Must it?" she would reply. "I don't see why. Great clumsy louts of conceited young men—that's all they are." Then she would nod her auburn head wisely at me, her lips curling into a bitter smile. "I soon brought them down ■ peg," she would cry delightedly, and then yawning and stretching she would leave my room.

She told me this so often that I would become imbued with the idea that Society was filled with feeble-minded shallow gorillas who pranced about for no other reason than to annoy Doll. My mother was in despair. The young men were brought down so many pegs that eventually they avoided the corner where stood this exterminating young vixen, and went to some more docile débutante who appreciated whatever value they may have had. Dance after dance my mother and Doll stood sternly side by side doing the Season down to a finish. Gradually the invitations lessened, the great houses began to fasten up their doors. The Season waned, and then it was over, Doll retired gracefully, and God knows how thankfully, from Mayfair's marriage market. She cut her hair short like a sixteenth-century page and became quietly and unobtrusively Bohemian. I could not help admiring her. She had had the strength of character to go her own way, to turn against convention, and be, even if a trifle eccentric, a distinct and rather attractive type of her own making.

"But don't you ever want to marry?" I would ask her, and I might have been suggesting she should swallow bitter aloes by the expression on her face.

"Men bore me stiff," she would reply. "What a pity it is one can't have babies without them."

It was not long after this that she set out to be an artist, and began to take lessons at the Slade school, and from this she became one of the best of the modern school of art, with Mark Gertler, that beautiful Jewish genius, as her friend.

My mother, giving up all hope of Doll as a *débutante*, turned to me for consolation. I made up my mind I would not disappoint her. I would at any rate give this "coming out" business a fair chance, and go into it with a more or less open mind. I went to Court. There was nothing outstanding about my presentation. I blended into a procession of white-clad virgins, and made my curtsy in unison with them. But I was inwardly stricken with terror on that strip of crimson carpet. I saw a look of interest flash into Queen Alexandra's eyes as they rested on my mother and then upon me, but the King passed coldly over me as much as to say: "So this is the poor specimen who did not even know the date of my birthday." I seemed to be nailed to the floor by clamps of unyielding steel. It was not until a somewhat perturbed Lord-in-Waiting came forward and swept my train over my arm, whispering urgently to me to "Go," that I dragged myself ponderously backwards and disappeared thankfully from view.

I remember so well my first real evening frock. What I mean by "real evening" is that it showed the regulated portions of my figure the fashion at that time allotted. It was black, with an orange fichu made of chiffon. The idea was that I should appear as if to be issuing from a flame. A pretty idea that was meant to be alluringly unique. But, alas, I was incapable of carrying off the full effect. It failed somehow to electrify all those that gazed upon it. My sallow self-consciousness had not the necessary spark to light that flame and the dress just looked what it was—rather an ordinary black dress with a limp orange fichu.

Nevertheless, I went forth cheerfully into the social fray. I can assure you I was full to the brim of heroic resolutions. My heart had ached for my mother's disappointment over Doll. It was up to me to keep the family flag flying through the Seasons. I stood by my mother eagerly. I tried, indeed how desperately I tried, to throw into my expression the

"come hither" look that would be certain to force the young men to my side. A few came, not because they wanted to, but dragged unwillingly by over-zealous hostesses who wished to see all the young people having a good time. I did not dance well. I was perfectly aware of that, but I thought maybe I could charm my partners by the brilliance of my conversation. But dancing young men do not talk. They never say more than: "Are you going to Lady So-and-So's dance?" or, "Topping floor this, by jove," and how could anybody possibly be scintillating about other people's parties and other people's floors when they are young, and there is music, and they are longing to be made love to.

Of course there were the lovely parties, such as Londonderry House, Devonshire House, Apsley House and Stafford House. Glittering jewels, old names, historic associations; the very cream of England's aristocracy parading before my eyes. Dukes, marquises, exalted noblemen of every rank, whose wives were beautiful and gracious and of an old-world dignity. Anyone who has ever witnessed the Royal quadrille in King Edward's time, with Gottlieb's band crashing out the music, will have known perfection of splendour and of grace. Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland, used to hold a kind of *salon* at Stafford House, and I think out of all the social gatherings I remember this one was the most dazzling. She herself was the loveliest duchess of those days. Standing at the top of the stairs with the Duke of Sutherland by her side, she seemed unreal. Impossible almost that any one woman should have all these virtues and deal with them so simply. Her graciousness was natural. She could not do an unkind or an ungraceful thing. She was artistic and she collected together in her *salon* all the great people of the day—artists, musicians, actors, dancers, ambassadors and kings. The conversation was on so high a plane that an ordinary remark fell like a bombshell in their midst. My father and mother were great friends with this famous hostess, and I went in their shadow. There were a few other girls scattered about the rooms looking as unsuitable as I did. My great love at that time was the Marquis de Soveral, the Portuguese Ambassador. Indeed, everybody loved him, it was almost impossible to avoid it. I never knew him, but I used to follow him about

and gaze at him; in fact, I followed him about so much that one of the Portuguese secretaries thought I was admiring him and became a nuisance. Those were wonderful days, when England was at its best, before all the great houses were taxed into the market and sold up into modern flats. Before all the great incomes were levelled and lowered until they could not keep their inheritance, and were obliged to sell and sell and sell until their properties were gone, and those depending on them thrown on to the dole.

I went to the Opera. I tried, but failed, to appreciate Wagner, even with Kirby Lunn singing and Hans Richter tearing every ounce of music from his orchestra. I knew André Messager, the manager of the Grand Opera syndicate and composer of the famous *Véronique*, a sweet, irascible little man whose music I adored. I heard Joseph Joachim play at St. James' Hall, and Ysaye and Adelina Patti at the Albert Hall. I heard Herr Kubelik at a private party at Brook House and the glorious Caruso, whose voice had such an immensity of tone that sitting in a room listening to his singing you felt as if you had been blown out through the doorway, chair and all. My father had a private box of his own at Covent Garden, so we never missed a single Caruso night—*La Bohème*, with Melba, *Madame Butterfly*, with Destinn, *Pagliacci* and *La Tosca*. How many times, I wonder, did we go to them. What evenings they were. What a chance to have been able to live through the short span of Caruso's career. We became his friend. We met him so often singing at private parties. Just like a fat, grumbling baby he was, without the smallest sign of conceit. He had a great sense of humour, and was always doing little tricks to amuse us, even when he was in the middle of a part. His caricatures of himself were incredibly clever. He drew one specially for me, which has unfortunately been stolen from my house. There was something very lovable about him because of his naturalness and humour. The greatest singer that has ever lived.

I remember the gala performance given at the Opera House in honour of the King of Spain, who had come to England, so it was whispered, to choose a bride from one of our beautiful princesses. He was just like an irresponsible boy and loved nothing better than turning cartwheels in the Royal corridors.

A State Ball was given at Buckingham Palace in his honour, and everyone gathered round him wherever he went. Sometimes he would dance more than once with a princess, and the dowagers would all band together nodding and whispering. But, when the dance was over and King Alfonso bowed, and laughed, and kissed her hand, and left her, the dowagers would straighten up again into a regiment of watchful curiosity. I am sure the young King knew how eager they all were, and was playing a game with them. He knew then that Princess Ena was to be his queen.

I enjoyed my first Season in spite of Doll's gloomy forebodings. I did not find it quite as tedious as she had. It is true I did not care for private dances, where you relied on the tact and technique of your hostess and the complacency of men. My mother was not exacting. She was not of the kind who will drive her daughters hither and thither like frantic slaves upon a chain. Doll and I were never made to feel that we were in the market, and that we were being clothed and taken out for no other purpose than to be looked over by eligible young men. We went to all sorts and conditions of parties. There were so many things to go to besides dances, so many people to be seen. It did not amuse my mother any more than it did me, to sit in a long line of chaperons along the wall. If a girl danced more than one dance with the same man, a look of triumph would flash into some hopeful mother's face, and all the other mothers would scowl at their failure progeny who kept returning to their sides. The supper dance was a source of agony to me in case I was not asked. All the mothers would be claimed by gallant fathers and the chaperone sofas would be emptied, but some of the girls would get left, and I was usually one of them. The ladies' cloak-room concealed our suffering and once more the lavatories sheltered our tears.

My parents, seeing that it was useless to drag me to dances any more, proceeded to fill my life with simpler things. Evidently there was something about their daughters not

suited to Society. So they turned to another side of things, a side that they also enjoyed and understood. We went to theatres and restaurants. Day after day we had lunch at the Savoy—the Grill Room there that holds so many memories, the swing door that let me into a new world, the world to which I really belonged.

It was clever of my parents. They were not going to be beaten just because a couple of girls had not made their mark in Mayfair. There were other sets, other surroundings. They realized that it was better to have an anchorage of friendship than founder in a whirlpool of acquaintances who did not count.

It was then that I began to meet such famous men as J. M. Barrie, Bernard Shaw and Sir John French; the gallant officer whose button I had worn on Mafeking night. I began to attend more to my personal appearance. I bought two little curls on wires and pushed them into the hair on either side of my face. The effect was softening and becoming when I remembered to conceal the wires, but, being vague, I nearly always left them exposed along the parting. I tied a ribbon round my neck with a bow under my left ear, and most daring of all, I touched up my cheeks with rouge. That first little box of rouge, how my heart thrilled to it. I thought it would somehow lead me instantaneously to heaven. Doll despised me for all this. She considered that nature had dealt kindly and generously with her. Her perpetual crying insistence that she was much admired prevented her from attempting to improve upon her personal appearance. Sometimes she could not even be bothered to brush her hair. She bit her nails, mostly from nerves, but a little also from ill-temper. Like the lighting of a match she would flare up, and as quickly die out as her temper burnt itself away. I was more sulky. My anger would smoulder and remain. I could feel it lying like a leaden thing within me, weighing me down and preventing me from acting as I wished.

It was my figure that worried me the most. It was very full and round and somehow seemed too heavy for my height. Nobody thought of dieting in those days—you left yourself more or less in the same mould God and your parents had fashioned you. Of course we all wore corsets, and the measure

of our vanity depended on the strength of the lace that held our corpulence together. The bones in those corsets—how did we ever put up with them? The awful feeling when you sat down that your waist was being pierced by bands of steel, and being short-waisted, the whalebones in my corsets always snapped in two and little sharp spikes emerged into the open and tore into my flesh. Yet the faces of the women round about me were unruffled and at peace. They did not show their torture any more than I did. We ate a full meal, praying fervently that our laces would hold and longing for bedtime and the hour of our release.

I met Lord French for the first time at the Carlton Hotel, where he was having lunch with my father. It had been most carefully arranged that my mother and I should come in after lunch in case we might be in the way. I was in a fever of expectation. My newspaper hero had come to life. The man whose photograph I had pinned all over me on Mafeking night was going to step suddenly into reality before me. It seemed to me too good to be true. I felt as if I was about to meet Napoleon. By the time we got to the Carlton we were not at our best, my mother and I. She was always a little shy of new-comers, and I could tell by the fluttering of her small hands and by the flush on her face how unusually apprehensive she was. As for me, I was a burning scarlet mass. I could feel my nose spreading across my unfortunate face, and my eyes falling back into my head. I knew I should not be able to utter a word. I remembered my adenoids, and the immense size of my waist. No inspiration of poise or deportment came to my assistance. I stumbled into the dining-room, following my mother blindly. I was conscious of people I knew endeavouring to smile at me, but I could not turn my head. Then we arrived at the table, and I gave a great wrench to myself and looked down.

My father and Sir John French were immersed in military discussion which, after we had been introduced, they continued just as if we had not been there. How infinitely glad I was of this spare interval when I had time to examine this pictured hero of mine without disturbance.

He was just a typical soldier, short, thick set and healthy looking. But, unlike so many soldiers, he had not the densely

drilled look that reduces the army to an expressionless mould of perfect manhood. An actual human being gazed out of the bluest of eyes, and when he looked at me I knew in a minute that at last I had found a friend.

Afterwards, when I knew him really well, I realized why it was we had so much in common. He was like a child. Much more of a child than I was, and it was these weaknesses of his that made him so really lovable. His friendships were part of him, so much part of him that if he lost a friend he seemed crippled. His jealousy sometimes blinded his vision. He had to have all or nothing. He would not share his friends with anyone. He had an abundant sense of humour and could laugh heartily even at himself. But above all else he was divinely human; it was this humanity of his that drove him on to his knees in the battlefield, taking down the dying messages of officers and men he loved. It was this humanity that weakened his strength and lost him the Command in France. I was with him when war broke out. I heard what he said then, and knew just how he felt. I saw him in Paris during the War, a sick man, in body and in mind. I was with him five days before he died, this gallant little General, lying alone, forgotten and unforgotten. A man whose only real fault lay in the fact that he was human.

We saw a great deal of Sir John French in those early days. My mother and I would often take him to the theatre, but he always wanted to be in the front row so that he could have a look at the girls. If we took him any further back than the front row he would punish us by falling asleep, and only by sticking pins into him could we awake him. He would come and stay at Orchard Lea, and Doll and I had a sitting-room he called "The Piggery" he used to creep into and look at all our scrap-books. I went often to Aldershot when he was in command there, and once, at a big review he had, I went up in a captive balloon because he dared me to. I shall never forget the sensation as we rose higher and higher above the parade ground. Chat was with me, and two officers manipulating the balloon. There seemed to me no adequate reason why the bottom of the basket should not fall out; in fact I became convinced it would do so. When we reached the end of the rope the balloon started pulling sideways. It felt as if we were

just bodies tied to the end of a kite. One of the officers said he was sure I would like to look over, so he sat on the extreme edge of the basket and tipped it to one side. It was all I could do not to throw myself over and get done with it. By the time we were lowered to the earth I was in tears.

It was during these restaurant days I met men whom otherwise I feel sure would not have crossed my path. I had lunch with Sir Joseph Lyons, who interested me enormously. He told me that he started his sons from the very beginning of the business, and that he believed in every man working his way right from the foundation of a thing. "Even you," he said to me, "with your writing should know intimately the people you are portraying. You should live amongst them and make them your friends. Imagination is but one of the children of knowledge."

I met Sir Arthur Pearson because of my writing. He accepted many of my stories. I used to lunch with him at the Savoy Grill both before and after his eyesight failed him, and my heart would ache to see him going so bravely and calmly into darkness. A wonderful man. One of those modest and silent heroes doing unglamorous but great things for their fellow creatures.

Seymour Hicks and Ellaline Terriss came often to Orchard Lea. Lovely little Ellaline with her sweet composure and delicate charm; a perfect contrast to the temperamental genius she married. The thing I remember most about Seymour was his generosity. Not only generous in giving concrete things, but he would give his vitality and energy to everything he did. He was like a whirlwind. His laughter and his tears followed so closely upon one another's heels. I think in England there has been no better acting than Seymour Hicks', and no one who has played an English part with such faultless French technique.

It was through Seymour and Ella that we first met Phyllis Dare. She was the most perfect child I have ever seen. We knew Phyllis long before we met Zena, and all the time Guy Laking used to say to us: "Phyllis is lovely but you should just see Zena." He said it so often that we got obstinate about it. We felt that no human being could possess the many qualities that Guy bestowed upon this girl. But eventually

fate led us to her, and we were forced to admit that Guy had in no way exaggerated. I suppose really they were at that time the most perfect sisters in the world. They were indeed world-famous. Their post cards were on sale throughout all Europe, and yet through it all they remained charming and sweet and utterly unspoilt. Theatrically they were the biggest box office draw at that time on the stage. Socially they were equally in demand. To be seen out with a Dare sister meant you were a fashionable success. The queue outside the stage door of whatever theatre they appeared at, depleted the Mayfair ballrooms of most of the eligible young men. And through this clamorous crowd Maurice made his way slowly but surely. The little round-faced boy grown up to manhood, still a little difficult and moody, but with infinite charm, gained eventually for himself this beautiful girl who had London at her feet.

A little later on I met J. M. Barrie, and I do not think there has ever been anyone else in the world who has filled me with so much alarm. Even now as I think of him my heart falls with a sickening thud of fear within me. Why, I cannot say, because at one time I knew him better than anyone else in the world. But I think my anxiety came from an intense desire to please him and the difficulty of attaining that desire. He used to lunch nearly every day at the Savoy Grill and so did we. He would slip into a chair at our table and feel at home there, so he said. He was very fond of my father and as usual the conversation would be mainly between the two. Now and again my mother would venture upon a remark, and the solemn talk would break for a moment, because whenever she had anything to say it was as a rule worth listening to. But I would sit, overwhelmed with shyness, ravenously consuming food in order to appear preoccupied and busy.

I shall never forget the first day I lunched alone with him at the Savoy. I was dressed up to the eyes. Fresh colour on my face, new pin curls in my hair. I remember I wore a black straw hat with a pink rose clamped on the front of it. I had rather an ill-cut skirt, but the whole effect was uplifted by the elegance of a little black velvet coat outlined with braid. This coat was unusual and artistic, so that I felt Bohemian and more confident than usual. My pin-curls fitted becomingly into

the spaces on either side of my hat. A black velvet bow nestled beneath my left ear. The whole outfit was roguish and young looking, and for the first time I met J. M. Barrie without tremor.

But alas. The crest of the wave that I was on soon carried me out of my depth. I became over-confident. The moment we were seated I snatched up the menu and began in a lordly way to order what food I wanted. No sooner had the waiter departed than J. M. Barrie turned to me and said in that lovely Scotch voice of his: "I don't think a girl should take command of a situation when a man takes her out to lunch, so that before he has the happiness of asking her what she would like she has already given her order to the waiter."

I was shattered. Everything on me and about me felt wrong. I realized that in reality I was a figure of fun with that ridiculous rose in my hat and the velvet ribbon gripping my throat. But I never forgot that rebuke of his, and every time a man asks me out to lunch or to dinner even now, I sit modestly and wait for him to give the order, although I am practically a vegetarian and the order is invariably meat.

It was a wonderful day for me when J. M. Barrie asked me if I would like to join up with the Peter Pan company and him, and go with them all to Paris. You can imagine what this suggestion must have meant to a girl who had never been anywhere further than Scotland, and how thrilled with excitement I was. My parents, with their wonderful large mindedness, fell in at once with the idea, and before I quite realized what was happening I found myself at the Hôtel Continental in Paris, with J. M. Barrie and Charles Frohman.

Mr. Frohman was the most lovable of men. One of the really charming Americans it is so infinitely refreshing to meet. Wherever he went he gave liberally. It was one of his theories in life. "I like to see people taking off their hats to me," he would say, "even if I have to pay them to do it."

Pauline Chase and the rest of the company were scattered in various hotels over Paris, but we saw them almost every day. Hilda Trevelyan, Margaret Fraser with her Botticelli face and glorious Madonna blue eyes. I knew Margaret Fraser really well because she used to come and stay with us up in Scotland, and stride over the moors in a kilt and with a gun over her shoulder. It always seemed so unsuitable somehow that she should be so

fond of shooting with that angelic expression of hers. But the fact remained, she was as bloodthirsty as any man on the moors, and by no means an inferior shot.

We had a wonderful time in Paris, and I lost a little of my shyness in the midst of that light-hearted crowd. Of course there were the silent days when J. M. Barrie and I would go out together and never say a word, but we were never awkward together. I knew he did not want to speak, and never broke in upon his mood. There was a quiet understanding between us, and his days with me were effortless in consequence.

Pauline Chase was like a little golden boy with her minute features and slim young figure. She was a shade too slim for the French people's taste, and I think they had hoped for the old-fashioned type of pantomime boy. This will-o'-the-wisp of a girl with her dancing and delicate ways kept them incredulous but kind. "Mais! Elle n'a pas de poitrine," was their comment when they passed her in the street. Nevertheless the theatre was full, and the play was a great success.

One day we drove out into the country in an enormous wagonette and played cricket. The stage hands versus the cast. J. M. Barrie captained the stage team and played a very excellent game. He seemed to enjoy every minute of it; it was the best day in Paris for him. Mr. Frohman and I sat on a bench under an enormous rug and watched them. It was only quite late in the afternoon that we all returned in our three-horse wagonette to Paris.

The next day, an unfortunate day for us, we arranged to go to Armenonville and have lunch. Only the three of us went—J. M. Barrie, Charles Frohman and myself. It was a lovely drive and we all three felt in a holiday humour and prepared to eat an enormous meal. We sat at a little table in the garden and we gorged—there was no other word for it—and then satiated and rather sleepy we returned to Paris.

The next morning disaster fell in our midst. Our feast at Armenonville had let us down. A waiter came to my room and informed me that Monsieur Frohman was very ill indeed and would I go down at once.

I found J. M. Barrie looking very sorry for himself, curled up in a stiff arm-chair. He had had a horrible and gruesome night, so he said, and was still very far from well. He thought

a doctor should be called in because he was anxious about the condition of Mr. Frohman. I could speak French fluently at that time; it was long before I became muddled by Malay. The manager of the hotel was extremely kind and sympathetic and said that he knew of a very good doctor who lived nearby the hotel. We waited what seemed an eternity of time and then there was a terrific clamour outside, and the door was flung open and Monsieur le Médecin was announced. He annoyed me the moment he entered. I do not know what it was about him, whether it was the high spots of colour in his cheeks, or his small round eyes like beads that seemed to be snickering and sniggering at me. He went straight into the inner room and examined Mr. Frohman. When he came out again he was tapping his hand with his black-rimmed glasses and looking extremely important.

"Monsieur has the fish poisoning," he said. "He is very sick indeed."

"But they told us it was frogs," I replied. "Not fish."

He glared at me. I had considerably upset his dignity, and in silence he sat down and wrote out a prescription which he handed to J. M. Barrie without so much as glancing at me. Then he bowed himself and his rosy cheeks and his bead-like eyes out of the room and we were free of him.

We were supposed to leave for London the following morning, but I had visions of these two dying on my hands and of a French funeral, of more insinuating undertakers, and the bill for it all being handed in to me. I did not sleep at all that night, and I was in such a state of nerves in the morning I could hardly telephone down to their rooms to find out how they were. J. M. Barrie had entirely recovered and Mr. Frohman was better, but he was not well enough to undertake the journey home, so J. M. Barrie and I returned alone. I do not think Mr. Frohman ever recovered entirely from that poisoning, for he seemed to be a very sick man indeed right up to the time that he died.

You see how full my life was of colour and of interest. These were the people of my dreams, men and women and

children who worked. No matter what it was, as long as they employed themselves at something. It fascinated me, this toiling and striving for fame. I could talk to them. There seemed to be no dead weight upon my mind when they were near me. It was those who lived in the glittering social world who seemed to be apart from me. I was awkward and uncouth amongst them. I had not their ease of manner, and felt I only belonged by circumstance and not by right. I think there are certain lines we humans run upon, and there are so many million people to each line. If we find ourselves on somebody else's line our progression ceases and we can only go against them instead of with them.

It was not very long after this that suddenly and swiftly the wheels of fate turned into their definite direction, and I entered quietly and unexpectedly upon the road that led me after seven years into Paradise.

It must have been fate, for what else could it have been that sent a letter suddenly to my mother from someone she had never heard of and never even seen. The writer explained that she was forming a little amateur orchestra in which she was very anxious Doll and I should join. It only consisted of local girls, and she sent a list of those who had already accepted. It was a charming letter, beautifully written and expressed, and it was signed: "Margaret of Sarawak—Grey Friars—South Ascot." Should we accept or should we not? My whole future, if I had known it, hung balanced in my parents' hands. They did not really approve of our going. It was unusual, this orchestra, and the picturesque title of its inaugurator. "What on earth do you want to go for?" asked my father a little irritably. Doll and I looked at one another. We had no idea really why we wanted to go, but we both felt if we were not allowed to it would break our hearts.

"I think it will do them good," said my mother, "and it certainly can't do them any harm."

Doll played the side drums and kettledrums really well, having had lessons in Windsor for some unaccountable reason on both of those instruments. It was part of her boy's mentality. She would spend hours practising rolls on the side drum. In fact, so vigorously did she wield the sticks that her wrist bones almost grew out of her skin, and gave to her slender

hands a curious malformed look, as if at one time she had broken both her wrists. I, of course, could not play anything, but in order to enrich the tone of Doll's side drum, I had, not without a tremor, purchased a big drum, some cymbals and a triangle. Every portion of my body seemed to have some instrument attached to it. I positively vibrated harmony and rhythm. Hitherto we had had no scope for our talents. Only in the seclusion of our rooms had we let ourselves musically go. We went very far as a matter of fact once we had started. So far, that we quite lost the melody in the clamour of our beating, rolling drums. This orchestra would be the anchorage of all our discord, if only our parents would allow us to join up and go. They did allow it. You see, they nearly always did their best for us. If only the young would believe this of the old; that, whatever they do for them or do not do, their decision comes from the very highest motive. How often I used to say to myself: "If ever I have children, how different I shall be to them to what my parents are to me." But no one can be different. Mothers, fathers, children, all pour out of a mould, and we live, and behave, and say the things that generations before us have already said. I think God only made one mould, which civilization has done a great deal to destroy; but what is created from the very essence of Divinity can never be entirely overthrown.

I shall never forget our entry into Grey Friars. Anyone who has ever seen the Ranee Margaret of Sarawak will appreciate something of the sensation we experienced. There was an amazing magnetism that drew us immediately towards the beautiful woman who was seated regally holding forth about her future orchestra. She herself was almost a professional pianiste. She could have been so had she wished. She was the very soul of music, but that was not all. She encompassed more than that. She flew from one subject to another, lightly, easily and brilliantly. Her mind was never still, and all the time her lovely blue eyes compelled us to adore her. She was like Mary, Queen of Scots, in her love of being loved. She would go out of her way to win affection, no matter who it was. A man, for instance, high up on a ladder painting the windows of her house was not allowed to complete his work until she had made sufficient friends with him and found out



J. Russell & Sons

(Above), "MY LITERARY CAREER"

(Below), MY WEDDING



Mrs. PARSONS, Mrs. SCOTT, Mrs. NUTT, Mrs. RHONA LINDO, Mrs. CHICHESTER, Mrs. CHICHESTER, Mrs. GLADYS PATNER, THE HON. DOROTHY BRETT,
 THE HON. THE KATE OF SARAWAK, THE HON. SYLVIA BRETT, Mrs. MARI CHICHESTER
 THE "GREY FRIARS" ORCHESTRA

all about his wife and children and his life at home. Everyone in Ascot and South Ascot was at her feet. She reigned supreme there in her house amongst the pines. The setting was just right for her, or so it seemed to us. We found no fault with the ugly little house, with its commonplace rooms and simple furniture. We grew to love the somewhat bleak music-room, with her seated at the piano playing to us, or else she was in the little library with its book-cased walls, and dark blue cretonnes, a table in front of her covered with literature of every kind. From the hall there would come the shrill screaming of a scarlet macaw, and upon the Rance's wrist a grey parrot would sit and wink his eyes at us. There seemed to be dogs everywhere, and of all sizes. One especially I remember; a great, big, shaggy sheep dog whose name was Jack. Outside amongst the pine trees there was a shrine of St. Anthony with flowers she had gathered at the foot of it. This shrine had a small candle at night just like a golden eye in the blackness of the trees. It was the burial-ground of all her pets, and she tended it carefully because to her they were her most precious friends. It was into this colourful atmosphere that Doll and I suddenly emerged. Was it surprising that it took hold of us and held us so that we could not tear ourselves away. The Rance was picturesque in everything she did. She was magnificent to look at. She was warm in her affections and expansive, and un-English. She made us feel wanted, as if it was really Doll and me she had been waiting all her life for. We began to blossom forth. We talked about ourselves. Doll became one transformed. It was as if she had been re-born. Her great dark eyes never left the Rance's face. She stared and stared as she absorbed her. I realized that there was only the shell left of what had once been my sister, and a new being, a being pulsating and thrilling had taken shape.

The Rance christened her band the "Grey Friars Orchestra," and we started immediately to rehearse for the performance of *His Excellency the Governor*. Harry Brooke, or the Tuan Bungsu as he was known in Sarawak, was one of the best amateur actors I have ever seen. He took the lead in this play, and Lady Susan Yorke played opposite.

Harry Brooke had a sweetness and charm beyond description. His voice was soft and hurried, and he had a somewhat

nervous manner, although he was not really shy. He was always laughing and good-tempered, and he was devoted to his mother. He lived at Grey Friars with her, and she adored him. It is very rarely in a lifetime that anyone can say they have known three really darling men. But the Ranee's three sons were such men; Vyner, Adeh and Harry. We had not been rehearsing long when Bertram Brooke, or "Adeh" as he was known, arrived upon the scene. He was a very different type to his brother. Diffident and constrained and infinitely modest, he would become covered with confusion when addressed. He had almost foreign manners, a reflection of his younger days in Heidelberg. His stiff little bow on being introduced, and his perfect politeness was unusual in England, where casualness is considered the very height of culture. But Adeh was not only surface courteous. We soon learned the loyalty and kindness in his heart. I envied the Ranee her two sons until I met the third, and then I coveted him. I thought it unfair that any woman should possess three men so charming.

Doll and I began to form ideas. We did not know then that Adeh and Harry were in reality almost soloists in their apartness and their lack of interest in femininity. Harry seemed ■ easy-going and Adeh, with his sudden sweet smile, so infinitely attractive. We speculated on what types of women they would marry, and, as I have said before, we began to have ideas. Then we heard that the Ranee's eldest son Vyner was arriving in England from Sarawak. Now there was a romance about this Rajah Muda, heir-apparent to the famous heritage, that filled the imagination and conjured up visions of a distant race living amongst palm trees and sago swamps. The Ranee had so often told us about this favourite son of hers, and as she would speak of him, tears of happiness would fill her eyes. She loved all her sons with the passion of ■ mother who is ready to defend her young unto death, but above all of them Vyner seemed to be so especially dear to her. How Doll and I wondered what he would be like. "I expect he'll be awful," said Doll in her definite way. "Mother's darlings usually are."

I made no comment. Indeed I was so absorbed in the Ranee at that time, I was not intensely interested. Now I come to think it over I see how clever she was. Her three sons were

unmarried. They hated going out anywhere, and refused to be at parties or go to dances. What then was she to do? It was important they should marry in order to safeguard the inheritance, but, how could they possibly fall in love with anyone if they kept themselves separate and apart. Only a really brilliant woman could have found an answer to this question. An orchestra entirely composed of anxious and willing virgins. Her three sons would be unaware of the delicate trap in wait for them. Twenty local females for them to look over twice a week as they rehearsed. Blondes, brunettes, all sizes and all shapes. Nice, healthy, simple girls, unspoilt and unscathed. What an inspiration! What ingenious skill, to steer these reluctant men toward the goal that meant so much. They all married girls from the Grey Friars orchestra. What choice had they. And the whole of my life's happiness came from that little band. Chance? Of course it was chance. There were hundreds of other girls who could have played the big drum better than I did, but it just happened to be me, that was all, because God was on my side.

I never quite knew in those early days whether Doll had dreams of marrying Vyner, but later I was to know for certain how great were her expectations. I think the Ranee had also marked down Doll as a possible daughter-in-law. She was fonder of Doll than she was of me, and it seemed more suitable somehow. Both Doll and I were under a spell of magnetism, and we thought and cared for nothing but the Ranee. It is true we often discussed the three sons and how evident it was that Adeh's destiny was to be Gladys Palmer, tall, beautiful and blonde. She was one of the mandoline players in the band, and her mother was a great friend of the Ranee's. We could all see this marriage approaching and we were all a little jealous of it. We whispered and nudged and glared at the unoffending Gladys, and we did our best to drown all sound of her mandoline at every performance. Harry was too occupied with his acting to notice any of us, but there was a girl who came to

the rehearsals with Gladys once in a while; a slim blonde girl with a delicate prettiness, whose name was Dorothy Craig.

I am trying to remember if I really had the slightest hope of being selected by any of these men, but I am sure I can honestly say it had not seriously entered my head. I was not looking my best at the time, my pin-curls had worn out and I had not troubled to renew them. I had settled down, so it seemed, into a kind of unkempt inelegance. I dressed badly. Lost buttons had been replaced by enormous safety-pins. My shoes were downtrodden and ugly. Doll's Bohemianism was at least artistic, but mine was despairingly drab. That was why I suppose when the miracle happened, I let it go past me unrecognized and even unseen.

Day after day we bicycled to that house beyond the bog. Day after day we pedalled up the pine-tree drive, passed St. Anthony and through the door that had let so much happiness into our lives. I have often thought how intensely irritating it must have been to my parents to see Doll and me sitting at meals like two stricken souls, gazing into space. Sometimes we smiled to ourselves as if over some secret knowledge, we gave one another sly looks as if we knew something our parents did not. I know now how much those looks can hurt. There is not a mother in the world who does not know how terrible it is to feel her children slamming the door as it were between them. But there is little mercy in the young. We sniggered and snickered to our hearts' content, and we kicked one another under the table, and nodded and looked wise about things of which they had no knowledge. How they put up with us is more than I can imagine, because two more maddening human beings could not have been found upon earth.

But it must be remembered it was not entirely our fault. We were not really responsible for what we were doing. Here was a side of life that we had never seen, and as I beat frantically at my drums and jangled my triangle, and thumbed my tambourine, the blood rose in me, and the music rushed through my veins. I forgot everything and everybody except the one woman who had laid this new life at our feet. Her enveloping charm, the scent she used, and the violets she always wore in her frock seemed glorified in our eyes because they belonged to her. She was demonstrative and colourful

in her affections, whereas my mother's devotion was so deep and concealed, we were too young to appreciate that it was there. We turned to the easy love; it was only natural at that age, though Heaven knows it was infinitely cruel. My father was enraged at our unnatural thanklessness. He knew that my mother was unhappy because of the Ranee. We could not mention her name in front of him. It was not jealousy, or envy in either of my parents, it was the way of things when children begin to grow up, the beginning of outside friendships and the letting in of a new life they did not wish to look at. My father's antipathy simply lay in the fact that we were hurting the one person he adored. But it was not the Ranee's fault. She was the last person in the world to willingly do anyone the slightest harm. It was not my parents' fault, and neither Doll nor I could be held entirely responsible. It was a delicate situation unskilfully handled by a rising generation whose touch was somewhat crude. Looking back at it now I can see where the clumsiness lay, but at the time our vision was clouded by self-interest and self-love.

In the meantime Vyner and Adeh and Harry were busy rehearsing for a series of short plays they were to appear in. Vyner's play was a well-known but somewhat gruesome episode called *The Monkey's Paw*. Ralph Alderson took the lead, and Vyner had only an extremely small part in which he appeared only for one second. All he had to do was to knock upon the door, thrust in his head and announce that somebody had died. Not a very cheerful part, yet Vyner's face as he peered in at the door was the only bright spot in that one-act play. Time after time he was rehearsed, but his smiling disclosure of death could not be subdued. It did not seem to matter, however, because his appearance brought forth rounds of applause and completely held up the rest of the show. He refused, however, to take part in *His Excellency the Governor*, and I would notice him sitting a little way back in the stalls whilst we were rehearsing the band. Then gradually he drew nearer and nearer until one day I found him in the front row close to where I sat with my big drum. "May I screw it up for you?" he asked politely, but exceedingly shyly.

I was covered with confusion. I could feel nineteen pairs of hostile eyes glaring at me. I could sense that Doll was

gesticulating wildly behind my back, and I felt sure what she was trying to say was: "Grab him, you fool, while the grabbing's good." It paralysed me. I could only mumble a few nonsensical and incoherent remarks whilst he, very red in the face, struggled with my unwieldy drum. "By jove, it is stiff," he said, falling back from it exhausted. "You must let me do it for you always. Please," and with a little smile and an awkward bow, he sank back into his stall. Only too soon our rehearsals came to an end, the performances were over and the twenty virgins scattered to their homes. But it had not been in vain. Adeh had so far progressed with Gladys Palmer that we knew his engagement was imminent. Pretty, fair-haired Dorothy Craig had fallen in love with Harry, and I had had my drum screwed up by Vyner two or three times a week. It all seemed promising but vague, and it was really a pity we had to disband when we did.

Doll and I seemed utterly lost. No Ranee. No joyful pedalling up the pine-tree drive. All we could do was to withdraw into ourselves and talk and talk about it. We would sit for hours and discuss the Ranee and her sons until we began to believe that there were no other people living but them. We seemed so apart from our family at that time, even meeting at meals seemed constrained and unnatural. There was nothing else in our minds but Grey Friars, and how soon we could go there again.

Then I received a letter from Vyner. I shall never forget the stir it caused, and the piercing looks that were levelled at me when it was handed to me. My letters were so few and far between, my correspondents so limited, that this little grey envelope was like a bombshell in our midst. The contents of it were typical of the man whose rather charming writing scrawled upon the page:

"DEAR MISS SYLVIA,

I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in writing to you. But I have in my possession your 'Drumstick' which you left hidden in the innermost recesses of the carriage on that last Saturday night. I have kept it as a memento of the band but will give it up on the occasion of your next visit here. This will be safer than sending it by post. I

go to Gloucester to-morrow for a few days and if you care to write my address is Chesterton House, Cirencester. We go *en partie* to the Strollers on Thursday. I hope it will be good.

Yours sincerely,

VYNER BROOKE.

PS.—How is the story getting on?"

This letter was solemnly handed round and read with a variety of comments on its purpose. But no objection was openly raised. I wrote and told him he could, of course, keep my drumstick, and that I hoped I would see him at the Strollers. I did see him in the distance but I was strictly kept away from speaking to him. Doll behaved nobly in her efforts to bring us together, but I was swept past him and out of the theatre before I had time to even look round to see where he was.

The Grey Friars orchestra had one or two more rehearsals which we were not allowed to attend. The rehearsals were not really important, but the Rance was reluctant to disband us until it was absolutely necessary. We had all been so happy together, and there were her three sons still unmarried. A few more rehearsals could not do any harm.

I think I am right in affirming that it was Harry who finally proposed to Gladys Palmer on behalf of his brother. Harry, smiling and suave, went to her with his hat in his hand and the infinite charm that was his, and asked her if she was prepared to marry Adeh. The next thing we heard was that they were engaged. I then received another letter from Vyner, and this time my family did not approve at all, although I myself could not see any harm in it.

"DEAR MISS SYLVIA,

Thank you over and over again for the stories which I received this afternoon from your sister. I know what a tremendous effort it must have been on mind and muscle to have produced such masterpieces—especially the 'Special Edition,' which I thought charming. I am looking forward to your next story which your sister says is to appear in the next *Girl's Realm*.

I am going back to my native land shortly and will always keep the stories by me and also drumstick as a sort of talisman and memento of other times (that is to say if you will allow me to keep the D.S.). The band is now over and the practice was far from perfect. C. C. made a very inefficient substitute on the big drum, always out of time.

I am glad you approve of my brother's engagement. He is very lucky.

Yours sincerely,
VYNER BROOKE.

To
The 2nd Drummer, G.F.O.S."

My parents naturally conceived from this letter that I had been carrying on a secret intrigue with Vyner, and writing to him behind their backs. This in a way was true. I had typewritten several stories and sent them to him through Doll. And I had written "Special Edition" on one to show that the copy he was receiving meant more to me than any of the others. His letter to me seemed to be discretion itself. I could not see that in any way he was culpable of duplicity or deceit. Indeed I would not have thought about that letter as any more than an ordinary "thank you," had not my parents' and Doll's attitude led me to believe there really was "something" in it. I read and re-read the simple phrases, and it still seemed to me that the whole purpose of the letter was that he would like to keep my drumstick if I would let him. That was all. But Doll argued and protested otherwise.

"Don't you see, silly," she said, "he likes you. You can get him easily if you want him."

I looked at her aghast. "Get him where?" I cried. "What on earth do you mean?"

The contempt in her expression was absurd. I must have appeared to her so supremely dense that I was really hardly worth while. But you must remember I was no longer the roguish Bohemian-looking girl whose pin-curls and complexion had impressed the Savoy Grill. I was sallow and straight-haired and dull-looking. That a man could have been attracted by me at that moment seemed nothing short

of a miracle. I could not believe it. I would not. "What a pity you are so stupid," Doll's shrugging shoulders seemed to say, and I could see that she despised me.

"But, Doll," I argued desperately. "All Vyner says is that he would like to keep my drumstick. Keeping my drumstick doesn't necessarily mean that he wants to—to keep me too."

"Don't try to be funny," she replied witheringly. "It doesn't suit you. He wants a memento of you—it's extraordinary but he does. Well—there hasn't been a wild rush of souvenir hunters round you before has there?" And then she added under her breath, not bitterly, but disappointedly: "Why did it have to be you, I wonder, out of us all," and her great eyes loomed at me as much as to say: "I wanted him, you know I did——" And I went away from her too bewildered and too disbelieving to help either myself or her.

I was hurried off to Scotland after this with my mother and Maurice, for fear that I should see Vyner again. It is not in reality surprising that my parents should have been anxious and upset. I was only seventeen, and they considered I was far too young to venture into a marriage that would entail living in the Far East. Sarawak seemed to them as ominous a future for me as if I had been sentenced to Siberia. They pictured it, and so did I, as a barren land dried up and scorched and desolate. They pictured the natives taking heads from bodies as easily as taking apples from a tree. They imagined me wrinkled and hideously tanned returning to them in intervals of three to five years, or else headless and never returning to them at all. Yet Sarawak looked innocent and pure enough in its pinkness on the map. If only it had not been at the other ends of the earth.

My mother was very kind to me and did everything in her power to interest and amuse me. Even Maurice in his shy abrupt way tried to convey how sorry he was that my one and only love affair had to be as it were prematurely nipped in the bud. In fact I had just begun to make myself believe there had not been a "love affair" at all, and never would have been, when a letter arrived for me from Vyner that left no doubt whatever upon the situation.

I remember we were having breakfast in that cool, green, Scotch dining-room, those lovely old-fashioned breakfasts, with porridge and steaming dishes on the sideboard. So different from the orange juice and toast and marmalade of to-day. My mother and I were alone when the letters were brought in. When I saw the familiar grey envelope with the small writing sprawling over it, my heart went up and down like a lift, and I could feel my face turning red. Fortunately for me, my mother was so eagerly searching amongst her own letters for one from my father, she did not notice this solitary epistle that seemed to me to stand out so guiltily from the tray. She did not see my scarlet cheeks and the way I snatched the letter and concealed it beneath the table. But how was I to leave the room with it? How could I further conceal it so that I could finish my breakfast in peace? Now, in those days it was the fashion to wear bloomers underneath the skirt. Strange bicycling bloomers that gripped respectably beneath the knee with strong elastic. Very cautiously and not without considerable difficulty, I squeezed the offending document through the elastic, and I heard the envelope drop with a gentle thud into the voluminous folds of my blue serge bloomers.

When my mother looked up from her letter she saw a composed and docile daughter consuming eggs and bacon with apparent quiet absorption. "Reg is all right," she said with the intense relief of one who had evidently been imagining horrors. "Did you get anything?"

Had she noticed that small grey envelope or had she not? I thought it wisest to tell the sort of lie that covered me both ways. "Only a silly circular," I replied and went on eating. It was so easy to deceive my mother. Lies were not in her nature, she had married too early to need them with her family, and it was unthinkable that she should ever wish to conceal things from my father. It is only fear that makes young people lie. The fear of being found out. There should be sufficient understanding between human beings to eliminate this fear. It is not the lie that is so wrong as the system that necessitates deceit.

At last breakfast was over and I was alone in my room. The little room with the attic window and a door that led into

Doll. Crouching on the low bed, my heart beating, and my fingers trembling, I read Vyner's letter in peace and undisturbed.

It was in a way a love letter. It left no doubt in my mind. He said in it that whatever happened he would wait for me centuries if need be. He could not understand why I had not been to see him. He was going to London and left me his address.

That was all. Just those few frantic lines, illegible almost in their haste, yet lines that meant that I with all my ugliness, my ill-fitting clothes and shabby shoes, had gained at last a lover. I could not believe it. I kept saying over and over again to myself: "It must be Doll really. There has been some mistake. He can't possibly mean me." I sat down and tried to write to him. I wanted to say so much. I thought of all the stories I had written, and I tried to weave some of my sentences into the same language. But somehow, where Vyner was concerned, heavily sweetened letters seemed out of place, and the missive I eventually smuggled to the post was by no means the masterpiece I had wished for. It was clumsy and childish and ill-expressed, and the moment it left my fingers for the letter-box I felt ashamed.

When I returned to Orchard Lea, Vyner had already left for Sarawak, and I found Doll steeped in mystery waiting for me. She despised what she called my regulated mind. "You've no spunk," she said. "I simply can't understand you at all."

I could not properly understand myself. It still seemed so unreal to me. The Rancee and the orchestra, and her three sons seemed like a dream now that it was over. Vyner's letter was unbelievable now that he had gone. The ordinary routine of my life had been shattered and shaken for a certain period, and for me with my inferiority complex it had produced no other sensation than of fear. I felt incapable of going against my parents, it would have been as if I were tearing myself from my frame and standing exposed before the world. I needed my framework and my family. They seemed to me a necessary background. Vyner with his Eastern country seemed a whirlwind of unrest. It would have been different for Doll. She was a pioneer by nature, and she loved adventure.

Her thoughts were modern and advanced, she resented restriction and authority and the fact that her parents could control her. All the time she seemed to be acting a part, hard and combative and resentful. Like Andromeda chained to a rock, she imagined herself held prisoner in her home. She would sit alone in her top-storey room and believe herself locked in. She would write passionate appeals to the Ranee to save her, and she would describe how she had been obliged to climb down a ladder from her window to enable her to reach her friend. The Ranee bewildered and a little bored implored my parents to protect her from this onslaught. She never knew, she said, when Doll would turn up at Grey Friars, and in what form. Once, when she left orders that she was not at home, Doll turned up smug and smiling in the little food trap that led into the dining-room. She turned up everywhere, and sometimes late at night. Infuriated letters flew to and fro, and the peace of our country home was broken. It was not that the Ranee did not care for Doll, indeed she was devoted to her; it was Doll's persistent passion that frayed and wore out their friendship. The Ranee liked happiness and laughter. She dwelt lightly upon things, and could see the fun in everything. Doll and I were serious and intense. We had not much sense of humour at that time. Close contact with the Ranee and her sons has now made me as philosophical as they are, and I can now look back upon myself and wonder why I ever worried about anything.

When I heard from Vyner again he sent me a lovely present in the shape of a small silver drum. It was made with a bayonet top that opened and revealed a velvet-lined box in which to put jewellery and gems. It was a perfect model of my own big drum, and on the top of it was written in his own writing: "From a friend."

The whole thing had been charmingly thought out and I was thrilled by it. I loved that silver drum. I placed it on a table by my bed, and in it I put some violets he had given me, and that I had kept crushed between the pages of a book.

Doll's face when I opened the parcel became like a mask, only her eyes were glaring lamps of fury. If only she had realized that at that time I would willingly have wished it to be hers, and it was all that I could do when I saw her face, not

to hand the silver drum to her and pretend that it was hers. My parents ignored the gift. I think my father's comment when he saw it was: "What is all this rubbish?" But deep down their anxiety increased. This Vyner Brooke was becoming a little more than a mere nuisance, and approaching the region of a menace.

When Vyner reached Port Said he sent me a post card. Now that I know him so well, and I have so often been to Port Said, I marvel at the impeachability of that picture. It was of an Arab fruit seller, and on the card he had written the same words that had been inscribed on the drum. I laid it regretfully aside, and tried to forget my one and only lover. I did not hear from him again for two years, when he returned to England.

During those two years I relapsed into my old life, and settled down into a kind of contented singleness. I had promised my parents that I would in no way communicate with Vyner, and this promise I upheld except for the sly insertion of messages to him through Doll. For Doll could write to him, and he to her, and he would send her photos of this Eastern country over which his father and his mother ruled. I was jealous. Of course I was jealous, but too weak-minded to act upon any line of my own making. I envied Doll her self-reliance, and her definite continuance of the friendship she needed and in which she found her happiness. She was so much heart and soul in her affections, and courageous against all opposition, whereas I swung this way and that trying to be all things to all men, and thereby being nothing particular to anyone. My brain seemed entirely clogged again, and the wheels that had run so easily for a while moved reluctantly now that their stimulant had been withdrawn. I relapsed into an almost childish futility, and gradually I found myself returning to de Maupassant and Zola. I saw the Rancee occasionally, and I heard a great deal about her and Harry Brooke from Doll. Harry was everybody's friend. I do not think he had a single enemy. Gay and unaffected, he made happiness in

everything he did, and the little house amongst the pines was beautified because of him.

So life went on at Orchard Lea, just as it had before we joined the orchestra, only now and again Doll would thrust the Rancee's name too prominently before my parents' eyes, and make the shadow deepen between her and them. My cousin Eve came frequently to stay with us, and she and I became closer friends on account of Doll's apartness. Oliver and Maurice had left Eton, and Maurice was at Sandhurst gaining more laurels and winning for himself the sword of honour. Oliver's brain was versatile and restless. He had two sides to him. He was clever and witty on the one side, and on the other poetical and dreamy. He was ambitious and eager to rise and make a name, yet the other side of him was idle, and he would feed upon visions of what he might become. He was unusual and unexpected, half bitter and half sweet. A complex character without any definite aim, but with an intense desire to be something some day. I often think now when I look back upon them that both my brothers' characters were less formed when they were young than Doll's was. Doll knew what she wanted always. There never had been any doubt about her. She was an extremist in everything she did, her friendships, her likes and dislikes were resentful and bitter. She was down on everything and everybody, except the Rancee, whom she loved. She would wait upon her hand and foot, fetching and carrying and looking after her. Neither Oliver nor Maurice nor I had such affection.

I do not think I was really happy at that time. The interlude at Grey Friars had so much disturbed me. I wanted to repeat it, to re-do all that had passed, and do it differently. But now Vyner had gone he was but the memory of a lost opportunity. Doll would continually tell me this with the infinite scorn that was hers. "You had your chance," she would say, "and you lost it. It will serve you right if it never comes your way again."

Gradually my visits to the Rancee became wider and wider apart and then ceased. My father and mother found every reason, every excuse, to keep me from South Ascot. They had had enough of Grey Friars and its occupants. Their patience was exhausted. One daughter had gone from them, it was

only fair that they should retain the other. They knew the fascination of that beautiful woman who lived so close to them. They realized that in some way, somehow she had succeeded where they had failed. She had made of Doll a soft and pliant thing, whereas at home she was hard and haughty and unapproachable; what, then, could she not have done with the vapid formlessness that was mine. Their only chance was to keep me from her, and to interest me in other things.

In reality they need not really have been so anxious. The family tie is a firm one to disjoin, it has no parallel. Anyone can say to themselves: "I am of a certain age now, I can think for myself and live my own life." But deep down in their hearts a still small voice will tell them the old-fashioned tale, that "blood is thicker than water." But all this disturbance and suppression began to have an effect upon me. I was, without realizing it, becoming once more introspective and self-centred. I felt injured and aggrieved with my first and only chance of marriage denied me.

One day, whilst Eve was still staying with us at Orchard Lea and things were a bit gloomy on account of Doll, we started a ridiculous and wild performance of various and dangerous circus acts. I often had moods of this kind, especially when Doll was looking glum. I could not bear to see that pretty face pale and uncared for, and the auburn hair lustreless and dull. Eve reacted to my inspiration. We called ourselves "the Bouncing Brothers." We were the latest trapeze sensation, and we performed a variety of twists and turns, swinging from an oak beam that stretched its way across the gallery. This beam could only be reached by jumping from the edge of a raised flooring, so we really were swinging in mid-air. Doll was our only audience, but she was appreciative, and gradually the shadows left her face and she was laughing as riotously as we were. I daresay our antics were absurd enough. It was easy for Eve, she was tall and slim and lithe, she could hang gracefully and swing easily to and fro. But for me, with my corpulence and lack of exercise, the very fact that I was hanging by my hands made me breathless and ungainly. As I swung from that beam I felt something give way at the

top of my spine, and a sudden pain like a knife went through my back and was gone.

I did not think much of it at the time, indeed I feel certain even now, that no real harm was done. Only a twisted muscle perhaps that would have passed by any normal girl. But you see I was not normal. I still craved for sympathy and the intense desire to be prostrated by ill-health. This seemed to me to be my opportunity. There was sufficient pain in my back to make it a little more so. My mother took me immediately to London to see her own pet doctor, Jock Anderson by name. He was just the very man I should probably not have gone to. Sweet, fussy and old fashioned he fell in with my mood. It was not easy for him to say to my mother: "Your daughter is hysterical, there is nothing wrong with her at all." Besides, the pain in my back was there, and is there still to this day. For a month I went every morning to a nursing home, and I had the treatment they call "high frequency" upon my spine. An electric battery was turned upon my back and sparks flew out of my spine, and my backbone became blackened and seared and very sore. By the end of a month I could not lie on my back, and I could not bear even the weight of clothes upon my skin, and yet I went on with this fanatical fancy for about six weeks, and then it began to dawn upon me that I was not receiving sufficient sympathy to make this treatment worth while. Feeling extraordinarily foolish I assured my mother that I was cured. I made a resolution within myself that not unless I was actually dying would I ever admit there was anything wrong with me again. I had had enough of doctors, and their doings, and I did not want to see Jock Anderson again. I can only remember a few vague incidents after this. Unimportant but sufficiently vivid to remain outstanding to me. We would go, as I said before, very frequently to the theatre, and nearly always whilst we were living in London, my father and Maurice would walk home and my mother and I return alone in the car. As soon as we got home we would cast off our cloaks, have a glass of lemonade each and a biscuit and retire to bed. It was a regular routine, and our cloaks and the half-empty glasses were a kind of talisman whereby my father reassured himself that we were safe and no accident had befallen us upon the way. It became mechanical with us,

and we did not have to think or remind ourselves about it. Yet, one evening, being very tired I suppose, we forgot our customary drinks and we went upstairs without removing our cloaks. How could we possibly have foretold my father's extraordinary reaction, and that for the first and only time in his life he should lose control and become like an ordinary panic-stricken human being. Just because he saw no cloaks and no half-emptied glasses the idea that something terrible had happened to us took possession of him. He never came upstairs to look for us, he never even shouted, he was so definitely sure that we were dead. He rang up Scotland Yard. He described our appearance, and what we were wearing. He described the car, with its number plate A.60. The streets of London were to be combed, he said, until somebody had found us.

It is almost impossible to imagine my brilliant father making such a blunder. There were we a few yards away from him, comfortably sleeping in our beds, and there was he down in the hall, ringing up Scotland Yard for us. I so often wonder what the feeling of this great man must have been when he rang up Scotland Yard and was obliged to confess to them that we had been safe and asleep in bed all the time. Yet he took the joke against him in excellent part. He was like that, dictatorial and sweeping when he was right, but when proved to be wrong accepting his error with a charming and somewhat humorous grace. Whenever we wanted to subdue him or get the better of him we had but to mention Scotland Yard. It was the only hold my mother and I had over him.

The next thing of importance I remember is a fire at Orchard Lea. We were all ready dressed and waiting for dinner when my father came hurriedly downstairs saying that he could smell burning somewhere. It did not take us long to discover threads of light flickering along the cornices of the gallery. My father rushed upstairs and found that an oak beam from under the fire-place in my mother's bedroom was blazing. We were four and a half miles from the nearest fire-station, and we only had one hose in the stables, which was some way from the house. Eve was staying with us at the time, but both Oliver and Maurice were away.

We managed to put out that fire before the fire-engine arrived,

but only because we turned ourselves into a perfect organization and stood in a long line handing buckets of water to one another in quick succession. We removed all the valuable pictures into the garden, and we pulled up the flooring and beat out the flames round the beam. Only our butler, Harman, lost his head and wandered about with a very inadequate tooth glass bottle, sprinkling water on valuable pictures and carpets that had nothing to do with the fire at all.

We sat down to dinner tired and begrimed. But the thing that lingers most in my memory is that out of us all Eve had been the lucky one. It was not ability on her part, it just happened as it did, that her dress was infinitely more damaged than ours were, with the result that when a claim was put in to the insurance company for the cost of a new frock she received the money, and we got nothing for our pains. My fragment of Jewish blood rose with indignation that it had not been me instead of her. "You messed it up on purpose," I said over and over again to her. "You know you did." But Eve, I also knew, was the very essence of virtue, and could never have allowed such a thought to enter her head.

Everything went on peacefully and quietly for a while, and we lived between long visits to Orchard Lea and shorter ones to London. Interesting people came and went. Lord French was a very frequent visitor. He used to come down to Orchard Lea in order to talk business with my father. But there were moments when he would come into "the Piggery" and be with us. I loved these visits of his, and I began to get to know a little more each time of the man who was to be my greatest friend. J. M. Barrie would come down sometimes, and Guy Laking, the King's Armourer. Now here was another charming personality. Gay, careless and inconsequent, he went cheerfully on his way. He was just like a bubble, effervescent, but very quickly vanished. His father was one of the Royal physicians. Everyone knew Guy and he was everywhere. My father seemed very fond of him; he could not resist his happy disposition.

So Vyner, the Ranee and Grey Friars began to fade a little from my memory. All I had to recall them by was my



FISHING IN SCOTLAND



RIDING IN THE NEW FOREST



*Sylvia from
her mother
W. H. Wood
1892*

Lambert Watson & Son

FIELD-MARSHAL THE EARL OF YPRES

silver drum, and a photo of the Ranee on the wall beside my bed.

I remember one night after I had not been feeling very well during the day, my father came up to my room to see if I was all right. It was so seldom my parents ever visited our room, so we arranged them as we liked and decorated them in our own way. My room was an amazing mixture of religion and reality, one wall being covered with crucifixes and rosaries and the other garlanded by photos of my friends, and coloured portraits of the men that I admired. No pictures of my father or my mother were in the room, only, as I have said before, the Ranee's portrait and the silver drum were by my bed. I do not know whether it was the sight of my insipid face upon the pillow that enraged my father first, or whether it was in defence of my mother that made him behave as he did, but, without saying a word to me he picked up my silver drum and sent it hurtling into a corner of the room, and then he tore down the Ranee's picture from the wall, threw it on the floor, and ground the framework and the glass to powder beneath his heel. I had never seen him behave like that before. He was not a violent man in any way. When the last bit of glass had crumbled and cracked beneath him he turned and went out of the room, slamming the door furiously behind him. Did I cry? Without exaggeration I deafened the whole house with my shrill screams. Hour upon hour I could be heard along the top passage, and down the back stairway to the servants' hall. Doll came in, and stood tall and straight by my bedside. "They've done it this time," she said. "I know now what to do."

"What?" I asked between my sobs.

"Never mind now," she replied, "but you wait. You'll see what I mean."

Doll always spoke in vague and threatening terms. Something was always going to happen according to her, but never did. On this particular occasion I was not listening really carefully. I was far too concerned by the sight of my

silver drum and the dent in its side that could not be put right. Now that I have children of my own I know really how my father felt. I so understand his desperate feeling of the unfairness to my mother. He was only protecting her whom he loved against the callous cruelty of her children. The next morning he was his old charming self once more, and did not, or pretended not to notice my reddened eyelids, and Doll's glowering hostility. He never referred to the incident again, and it was the last time he ever ventured anywhere near my room.

Then the time drew near for Vyner's return to England and Doll went about with a curious glow in her large eyes that seemed to light up her entire face. She warned me that Vyner was on his way home and that I had better make up my mind definitely what I was going to do. Why was it I had not her decision, what was it in me that made me draw back from everything? I was not altogether a coward, and it was not entirely fear that held me, but always I seemed to see my parents' point of view more closely than my own. It got in my way. It spoilt anything I wanted to do that was apart from them. It seemed to me so much more important what they thought than my own inexperienced ideas, and they did think marrying Vyner would be a great mistake. "You see," I said to Doll, "they must know."

"Know what?" replied Doll.

"About people, and the right thing to do," I tried to explain weakly, but Doll only laughed at this.

"Parents are all very well," she said, "but one grows out of them. The whole thing is, do you want Vyner or don't you?"

But the whole thing was I did not know whether I wanted him or not. I had only met him during those few rehearsals. I thought him charming and that was about all. "You have him, Doll," I urged her. "He likes you best, really. I am sure he does." It seemed more fitting that Doll should marry him somehow, for she was decorative and more developed than I was. She moved gracefully, and in spite of her colourful unkemptness she looked "somebody," whereas I might easily have been from the back row of some touring company's chorus. I felt like a back-row number and not like a Ranee.

As soon as Vyner returned the Grey Friars Orchestra reorganized, but it did not seem quite the same somehow and nothing was done. The Ranee, Doll and Vyner and Harry were always together, but I was carefully guarded and kept away. It was during this time that only by a twist of fate Doll's chance of being Vyner's wife fell through her hands.

It was a wet day. Rain dripped from the dark pines to the damp earth. Grey sky without any hope of breaking stretched everywhere. There had been nothing much to do at Grey Friars apparently, and the Ranee, I think, really to help amuse her sons more than anything else, suggested that Vyner should go into the next room and propose to Doll who was sitting reading there. She gave him a beautiful enamel necklace cut in little squares, one side blue and the other green, that she herself had designed and made. It was a lovely delicate enamel, exquisitely coloured. She told him to go into the Blue Room where Doll would be seated on the blue cretonne chair. "Give her the necklace," said the Ranee, "and ask her to marry you," and she laughed and kissed him and pushed him out of the room. Vyner has told me this story so often, I can easily visualize its happening as if I had been there and seen with my own eyes what took place.

Vyner went to that Blue Room as fully prepared to ask Doll to be his wife as a man could be. But, because Doll was not reading in the cretonne chair by the fire, and because she was standing by the book-case selecting a book instead, he entirely lost the purport of what he had entered that room to say. He forgot the purpose of his intrusion. He became confused and shy. Thrusting the necklace into her astonished hands, he murmured a few unintelligible words about his mother's enamel work and fled from the room.

Just because Doll had been standing instead of sitting her chance of being Ranee of Sarawak passed her by. So, who can say there is not a hand that works out our destinies for us? Who can decree that we should not believe in Fate?

It was after this incident that Vyner seemed to make up his mind definitely to marry me. He took Doll into partnership, and between them they worked out a scheme whereby he could approach me. My parents were still antipathetic towards

him and any idea of him as a husband for me. I was still not showing the slightest initiative either way. I seemed to go about mechanically as if powerless to act or think for myself. My father and mother took me to the Opera, but always just beneath our box sat Vyner and Harry, smiling and serene. They took me to Ascot races, but there they were, Vyner and Harry, still smiling and still serene. There was no suppressing Vyner, the more unpopular he was the more he seemed to be enjoying the joke. His good temper was unbounded. You could not ruffle him, he had far too large a sense of humour to allow himself to be annoyed. I found little notes he had written to Doll that she would leave lying carelessly about. Strange puzzling notes that conveyed nothing whatever to me when I read them. One ran as follows: "Dear Doll, try and bring 'the Parcel' over this afternoon." And in another was written: "Take 'the Parcel' to Windsor and I will meet you there." It was not until a long time afterwards that I discovered "the Parcel" referred to in these notes was meant to be me. It was in this way that they plotted and planned and were undetected. Doll used to invent some reason why we should drive into Windsor, but the reason invariably turned out to be Vyner lurking at the White Hart Hotel. Now I come to look back on it I realize what an unmitigated prude I must have been, saturated as I was with a form of conceited purity. Yet it was not altogether righteousness or any laudable quality in my character that made me disapprove of this method of approach. I was romantic. I wanted my own love affair to be an honest one. I was hurt at being called a "parcel" instead of a person. In fact I had lost my sense of humour where Vyner was concerned, and my sense of perspective about myself. I could not see that these clandestine meetings were romantic, and that this man with his obstinate pursuit was more like a legend than reality. Then one day the crisis came, in which I had to choose once and for all between my home and Vyner. I remember I was up in my room arranging some photographs when Doll came suddenly in upon me, transformed and trembling with disquiet. She locked the door behind her and stood leaning up against it staring at me. I shall never forget the expression on her face. "Are you prepared to run away?" she said slowly. "Are you?"



MY FATHER



MY MOTHER



(Above) MY BEDROOM WINDOW AT ORCHARD LEA

(Below) ORCHARD LEA GARDEN

"Run away?" I repeated stupidly. "Where to—what for? Whatever do you mean?"

She drew a letter from her pocket and I knew before she began to read it to me that it was another of those peremptory epistles ordering "the Parcel" to be taken somewhere. Wave after wave of sickly apprehension surged over me. I could feel myself gasping for breath. When Doll began to read aloud I kept saying over and over again to myself: "What am I going to do—whatever am I going to do?"

"DEAR DOLL (the letter ran), arrange that 'the Parcel' is delivered at the Squirrel Inn where I will collect it in my car. I will then take it away with me as arranged.

VYNER."

They had arranged it all. It was no use my endeavouring to have any say in the matter. Whatever feeble arguments I would be likely to put up would be frustrated by these two. Doll seized upon a small leather case and thrust it into my hands. "Pack," she cried. "And hurry about it. You must get out whilst THEY are away."

Then she went on to tell me how wonderful it would be for me. How I would travel to the Far East where very few white women dwelt, and how Vyner would not always be the Rajah Muda, but that one day he would become a "Sultan." It all seemed extravagant and fantastic to me, but as I listened to her I could not help becoming imbued with her enthusiasm. "You mean I may be a 'Sultana' one day," I said, and giggled foolishly into her serious face.

I cannot imagine anyone more irritating than I must have been, standing there with the empty case in my hand and simpering at Doll who was so intensely and whole-heartedly concerned in my affairs. She could imagine Sarawak habited with pale brown people. She could conjure up this distant land and make it seem desirable, whereas to me it was but the other ends of the earth, or else a pale pink shape in a map. Swamps or arid deserts, whichever it happened to be, it was the dividing line between me and everyone I knew. But as I listened to her I caught a little of her fervour. I forgot my father and mother. I forgot my fear. Rushing hither and

thither I packed the few things that I possessed. I often laugh to myself when I think over the contents of that brown case. Severe, simple and unlovely was that runaway trousseau of mine, and tucked into one of the pockets were my discarded pin-curls. The Squirrel Inn was about a mile and a half from Orchard Lea, and I was obliged to walk there. But I did not feel like walking, I ran through the forest with my heart in my mouth, imagining I heard footsteps following me. The moment I left Doll, the demon of fear pursued me on my way. I felt so uncared for, running through that little forest path, the brown case flapping against my legs. I felt so foolish with my scarlet cheeks and the damp hair clinging to my forehead. When I arrived at the Squirrel Inn panting and exhausted and hideous in my anxiety and fear, it was only to be told that my lover was not there. Apparently his car had broken down, and the message left me was that I was to hire a cab and go on as quickly as I could to Ascot. They were very kind to me at that inn and showed me into a little private sitting-room that was on the far side of the bar. There I waited until they had roused the one horse, and dragged the one cab out of the stables. That wait was my undoing. Had Vyner been ready with his car we might have been married five years before we eventually were. As it was, the comments of the cab driver and the sorry figure I cut sitting there with my scarlet face and untidy hair, took out of me all the glamour and romance of this elopement. Supposing Vyner did not really want me? Supposing it had all been forced upon him, and he had felt he could not face it, and that was why he had not come? I began to look about me wildly for a way of escape before it was too late. The cab driver was an old friend of the family, Mr. Tombs was his name. Not a very cheerful name when one is about to embark upon a new and adventurous career, "Gent broken down, eh?" he queried, thrusting his head in at the window with a wink. "So 'as my old 'oss, Missie—but 'e'll get you there all right, you see if 'e don't once 'e gets started."

I could not bear it, and quite suddenly the enormity of what I was contemplating doing came over me with overwhelming force. Here was I proposing to elope with a man I hardly knew, and go with him to a country that I had never heard of.

Panic seized me once again, and clutching my case I ran headlong from the inn. The innkeeper shouted, Mr. Tombs shouted, even the old horse stirred, but still I ran as if the devil were at my heels. Into the house I hurried, and up the cedarwood staircase to my room.

"I couldn't do it," I sobbed an hour later to Doll, who stood sternly by my bedside. "I tried, indeed I did, but I just couldn't do it."

Vyner took the failure of his plans with his usual philosophical good nature and prepared to return to the East for what he called a five-years' trip. Time meant nothing to him. He was a happy-go-lucky wherever he was. Just before he sailed he sent me an enormous basket of violets from Cornwall, and he wrote and said he had sent them as a kind of peace offering. He told me he was sailing from Southampton the following day.

"I hope you will forgive me for being a nuisance to you in the past," he wrote. "The more I think of it the more convinced I am how very selfish I have been in the whole matter. Anyway I can't bother you any more as I sail to-morrow. . . . Your always true friend,

VYNER BROOKE."

And so it was that for another five years I remained a spinster of the Winkfield parish.

PART III

MARRIAGE

DURING these five years I met a great many interesting people and I did a great many interesting things. I was not idle, neither was I particularly depressed. My brief love affair was over, and I knew that I could not possibly see Vyner again for such a long time that it was more than probable I would not even be remembered. I gave up all hope that I would ever marry. All the things I had so longed for fell away from me one by one. It had been a momentary weakness this yearning to be loved, perhaps I had always known really that such a life was not for me. Perhaps deep down inside I was resentful more than restless, that men only wanted women that other men wanted, and it was competition, the fight for a female thing that urged them on.

I became intense about myself and I took myself earnestly and seriously. I think I must have become something of an intellectual snob at that time, for it seemed I could not be interested in anyone who was not famous in some way—the environment of my own home, and the fact that I had already met almost everyone who was anyone filled me with a kind of conceit, and led me into a false position about myself. We were so often at the theatre I met nearly everyone upon the stage. We used to go round to their dressing-rooms and see them, and the lights and the glamour, and the smell of grease paint became an attraction from which I could not escape.

I remember going round to see Lawrence Irving one evening, and the reason I remember it so well is that there was something almost alarming in his personality, and the quick sad smile that flashed so seldom to his face. Of course, it

seems an easy thing to say now that it has happened, but Lawrence Irving, with his paleness and his untidy hair, seemed even then to be a tragic figure, as if some premonition of his sudden death hung upon him like a dusty cloak, and made all those who came in contact with him feel uneasy and discouraged. I saw Max Darewski grow from his velvet suitings into a man. The little Max that I remembered conducting a huge orchestra at the age of ten, his great eyes looming in his tiny face, and a cloud of dark hair sweeping across the fineness of his brow—the infant prodigy grown up into a boy, and then a man. I saw Robert Loraine, the gay cavalier of the stage, Dan Leno, Little Tich and Herbert Campbell. A kaleidoscope of talent and of art moving along with time, and I going with them admiring and enthralled.

They were different these people. There was no shame in their existence; their horizon was not clouded because they had not been asked to Lady So-and-So's ball, or invited to a duchess's reception. I could talk easily with most of them, conscious of their superiority, of course, but unafraid. I seemed to be able to enter their moods with them. No door was ever closed in my face. They accepted me, I think they even liked me in a way, and the memory of my home was like a coloured canvas, unreal somehow as if I had never belonged. The garden with the smell of its mown grass, the chains of clematis and climbing rose. Horses neighing in the meadows, a man's voice calling in the cows. My mother knitting, her serious face bent over her work. My father lying back in his chair talking, talking and I listening and longing to get away because what he was saying was serious and sad. It seemed he could see beyond most men and he would tell a little at a time of what he saw. England endangered—the England that he loved involved in the turmoil of blood and war. It was forever England that he spoke of, and had it not been for my mother sitting so quietly by him knitting and unmoved, such fear would have gripped me I could not listen to him. I did not want to know of these grim and awful happenings. I wanted happiness and life. "We are too old," I would say to Doll. "Why is it?"

"It is THEM." She would reply bitterly. "Nothing is of any use to them that is outside themselves."

Was it surprising that we found this brilliant man whose patriotism burned within him like a living flame a little irksome and unnatural, when we ourselves had not begun to think or care what country we belonged to. Was it surprising that we found his conversation too heavy and profound. He had his gay moments, but they were moments only, and they were nearly all reserved for Maurice and not for us. I settled down once more to my short stories and nearly all of them were accepted. To be able to write—to be able to put on paper all the thoughts that had been crowding and struggling to be free—to have that gift of expression so that those who read my words would see through them and know me and be kind to me—that was my ambition; that, and one other. I wanted, through my pen, to be able to strike back at this world I had found so unfriendly and so hard. I wanted to hurt somebody as I had been hurt, or as I thought then that I had been. But strongly as I felt these things my literature was weak. I would sit at my table filled with bitterness and rage, but from my pen dripped sugared words, and my little stories that were meant to pierce the strongest armour were in reality but the chatterings of a child.

The magazines were filled with my effusions. Mr. Spender, editor of the *Westminster Gazette* and a great friend of my father's was extremely kind. The *London Magazine*, and the *Woman at Home*, and a little paper called the *Planet*, that belonged to Harry Brooke, all accepted articles and stories as I sent them. I never minded how often they were returned to me. If one paper refused my work it did not mean they did not like what I had written but that it was the wrong kind of story for their pages. I was obliged to learn the market value of a line, and where it could be better sold. I became cunning and commercial, I began to feel the pulse of publishers. I knew exactly the kind of stuff they needed. It was a trick, this writing, not an art. I looked upon short stories as serving up cutlets instead of the joint. It was time, I said to myself, that I should promote myself from kitchen-maid to cook.

I made up my mind I would publish my short stories in collected form, and make a book out of the best of them. I sent them to J. M. Barrie and asked him what he thought, and this was his reply:

"27th February, 1908.

MY DEAR SYLVIA,

I like the stories very much, they are warm with feeling and have a grace that is all their own, and there are moments in them when the gentle reader will want to stop reading for a moment and propose to the authoress.

There are little things, there is some Scotch, for instance, that made me once or twice duck my head, but of these when we meet. There does not seem to me to be much that calls for alteration, and what I should like to do now is to send the MS. to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton. May I? Of course the publishers say that collections of short stories don't sell well, but we shall see.

I'm tremendously glad that I like them so much.

Yours always,

J. M. BARRIE."

His interest in my stories naturally worked like magic, and the reply from his publishers excited me so much I could not rest.

"We have had the pleasure of hearing from Mr. Barrie with regard to your stories, *Pan and the Little Green Gate*," they informed me, "and now write to say that we shall be glad to undertake the publication of an edition at 5s. and pay you a Royalty on the published price of all copies sold of 10 % on the first 2000 and 15 % afterwards. On copies sold in our Colonial Library we shall be glad to pay a Royalty of 3d. per copy.

We remain, dear Madam,

Yours faithfully,

HODDER & STOUGHTON."

I think I was in reality far more impressed by the "Dear Madam" than I was by the percentages. I seemed to emerge from uncertainty and belong to the earth. I agreed wholeheartedly to my publisher's suggestions, I dedicated my book to J. M. Barrie, and then I sat down and waited for it to emerge, and for the cutting sarcasm of critics. But the critics

were kind, far too kind perhaps for my complacency. They said that my stories had delicacy and charm, and that they were touching and poetic; at the same time they displayed a considerable knowledge of human life. My stories charmed by their excellent diction, their careful compression and their adroit allusiveness, and the touch of deeper meaning and real sympathy which lay, so to speak, at the bottom of the cup.

One paper, more flattering than the others, said: "Open the book and walk at once into the magic atmosphere of Fairyland. . . . *Pan and the Little Green Gate* is one of the best-written, quaintest and most fascinating volumes of stories that has appeared in recent years."

But they were not by any means all flattering. Several of my critics despised the book and its entire contents. My stories lacked substantiality, they said, and one paper even stated that they wondered why some of the stories had ever been re-published, their literary value being of so slight a character. "They were, after all," the critic remarked, "merely conventional episodes and could only fill in anyone's few odd moments."

I could not help wondering what sort of odd moments my critic was referring to, and I was tempted to write and ask him. But these adverse opinions were good for me, they prevented me from having an overweening opinion of myself. I wondered whether I was a youthful Spenser and his *Faery Queen*, or merely a clumsy quill driver whose anæmic outpourings were of no account. My friends were kind and careful in their judgment, they liked my book enormously, so they said, though I regret to say not many of them bought it. To the mediocre author these lending libraries are a shadow in the pathway; for, unless your book is of an outstanding literary quality who upon this earth is going to buy when they can borrow. So it was with my first-born volume. It was in every library. I used to meet it circulating. It hurt me to see it dismally trailing its way between Selfridge's and Barker's, each time it went out a little more battered and more stained. I would go and stand in obscure book shops where no one knew me and listen to people buying books, but they never even asked for mine. In the end I could hear my own voice timidly enquiring if they could sell me one—

they would look at me as if I were asking for an elephant, and a white elephant at that. "Never heard of it," they would say, and turn to another customer, and I would retire filled with as much incredulity as if they had repudiated Shakespeare.

Then, when my interest in this book had died I began to write another. This time it was to be a book of more maturity—the stories were linked together in one street. It was really rather an inspiration had I been capable of living up to it. But still I was too young. I can realize it now when I re-read the book how absurdly young I must have been. I took for my subject our own street, Tilney Street, and I tried to imagine what was taking place within the walls of those seven houses. It was an intriguing occupation and gave an added interest to those curtained windows. The story of "The Left Ladies" was intended to be Doll and me. Many of them were taken from people that I knew. Each house had its history as I passed from door to door. It was an enjoyable book to write and it made me feel differently towards that street. I felt it belong to me, and that these houses were but dolls' houses for me to play with.

Some of the stories were issued first in magazines, but they were all a little melancholy for that purpose. There was not much happiness in my houses, and my street was paved in gloom. That early association with de Maupassant and Zola had left its mark on my mentality, and I felt that behind all beauty there was a thin coating of cruelty and sin.

I sent the book to Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton without the influence of J. M. Barrie. They were not enthusiastic. They had made no profit on my other book, but neither had I; consequently they were a little dubious about venturing on this one.

"We certainly think that your new book shows an advance in many ways," they wrote to me, "but frankly we could not anticipate that it would be popular or would have more than a limited sale."

This was not encouraging, but the context of the whole letter was that they were willing to publish *The Street with the Seven Houses* if I would help so much towards the cost, they

would then pay me a Royalty of 10 per cent on all copies sold up to a thousand and 15 per cent after that. There was also threepence to be made on all colonial copies purchased. Feverishly I counted up my savings on prize winnings and short stories. I found that I could manage what they asked. My blood was up, I was determined my second literary offspring should be seen. Writing was not a lucrative profession unless you were on the front page, so to speak, and to get there meant the turning over and the passing of so many pages that were blank. Nevertheless I would go on. It is strange that over almost everything else except my writing I had an inferiority complex, but with a pen in my hand I felt supreme and certain of myself. This was twenty-seven years ago and I still have a pen in my hand and I still feel optimistic. It has kept me hopeful and happy all these years. It has been the will-o'-the-wisp of my ambition. Chasing a mirage is just as much fun after all as bowling a hoop.

Before *The Street with the Seven Houses* had been published I had met Bernard Shaw and grown to love him and his wife Charlotte. I do not think there has ever been anything quite like either of them, for to mention them apart would be like leaving a Romeo without his Juliet, or a Darby without his Joan. There was a fantastic charm about G. B. S. with his soft sarcasm and his lovely Irish voice. What a personality. What an enigma to the ordinary mind. The wonder of watching him speak, the way he would throw his slim body from side to side for ever restless and tremendously alive. Charlotte watching him, always at his elbow, always ready to admire or to praise. I remember how indignant she would be at his critics, how anxious for his health. I remember what I would feel like when I had been with him for a while, and how my poor brain seemed to have stretched itself like a thin elastic almost to breaking-point in my endeavour to understand half of what he said. G. B. S. was sweet to all young people. He did not expect intelligence from them, neither did he wish it. As long as they responded and were in tune with him and had the art of being appreciative listeners he was pleased. I was a willing audience. I loved his humorous conceit, the way he would wink at the world and everyone in it, even himself. He was a magician who bewitched all those who came in

contact with him, and my days were wonderful because of him. How he could have stepped down from his high prominence to trouble with an uninspired person like myself I do not know, but he named himself my literary parent. He never laughed at anything I wrote. I think had he done so I would not have dared venture his advice.

My parents were pleased that I had restarted my writing and that I appeared to have forgotten the Ranee and her sons. They were glad I had begun to make a few friends of my own and to give myself fresh thought and occupation. But I had not really forgotten the Ranee and her sons, the vision of that house amongst the pines and the beautiful woman and the three charming men was as vivid as if I had but lately been there. I followed eagerly any information I could obtain. Adeh I knew had married Gladys Palmer, but Harry was as yet unwed. I saw the Ranee whenever it was possible, and when we were in London I met the Rajah for the first time. Now here was a man to make one's flesh creep. I do not think I had ever met anyone who so inspired me with fear. It is impossible to say just what it was about him. Whether it was because in his way he was so starkly supreme, so apart from all of us, a lone, hard man, friendless and unafraid, or whether it was the unblinking coldness of his artificial eye. He was deaf, but he could hear the things we did not want him to. He very rarely spoke unless it was to issue an order, or contradict a statement. Spartan he was, and lean and inhuman. He lived uncomfortably in whatever house he was. Hard chairs and iron benches decorated his rooms. Sofas were self-indulgent, and an arm-chair woman-like and weak. "Don't believe in fripperies," he would say. "Damned effeminate. Never relax, and your stomach will stay where it is."

I looked at the Ranee and wondered how they had met, for two beings more separate in temperament could not have come together. I thought of their three sons and tried to picture what kind of a childhood they had had. Yet I think the Rajah really liked young people had he been able to unbend, because sometimes into his fierce lean face a smile would flash, and then pass, as if the act of smiling was a sin. Sometimes he would be quite playful and thrust his walking-stick into our ribs, and he would make us sit beside him while he questioned us.

Did we ride? Had we ever hunted? "Everyone ought to hunt," he said. "Clears the blood. Keeps you young."

It had certainly kept him young enough. But I think I would far rather have died amongst a million cushions than lived eighty years upon his iron law. I could see he was very wonderful, a perfectly disciplined, malevolent old man, and I could see he must have been a splendid ruler. But he was the sort of human being it is better to read about than meet, and I know I prayed to God that whatever fate was in store for me it would not in any way bring me too close to him.

There are open spaces in my life I cannot fill, spaces that are wide and silent and unshadowed by the footsteps of events. Voids of emotion, voids of thought and feeling. Just my body moving mechanically through the hours, taking no count of how they were being passed. My father still had his week-end parties all the time we were at Orchard Lea, and great men and women continued to go in and out of our doors. The most disturbing of all our guests was Lord Morley, at least as far as I was concerned; there were terrific preparations for his visit. Lord Morley loved music, classical music of all kinds, and my father, knowing it would please him, hired a small band for the week-end. I remember creeping into the gallery to watch the five anxious musicians who were pouring with sweat in that central-heated room. Lord Morley lay back upon a sofa, his thin face reposeful and content, his thin fingers gently tapping to the tunes. Suddenly he became aware that he was being watched. Rearing his head from the cushions, he turned and gave me a look of such murderous intensity my blood ran cold within me.

"What are you staring at?" he said icily. I never answered him. I ran headlong from the room, and I doubt if during that whole week-end I addressed one word to him or he to me.

Lord Morley was exceptionally minded in everything he did. His reception of trivial conversation was not genial. He seemed to dwell upon a higher plane from which he would descend only to meet those who were his friends. Oliver became his Private Secretary for a while, an alarming post I did not envy him. He did not occupy it long, for brilliant as he was it did not seem to be the sort of brilliance Lord Morley then required.

My second book then burst upon the world, and was received by the critics with unanimous applause. "Not for a long while," the *Pall Mall* announced, "has a volume of short sketches appealed to us more than this. . . . Miss Sylvia Brett in a short street of seven houses finds tragedy, comedy, joy, sorrow, love, life and death, and writes her little stories about each with a charm and insight and tenderness and intelligence that are beyond praise."

Another paper said that it was refreshing to find a young writer with such real imagination and so fanciful a pen. "With wider experience Miss Brett will write a story that will bring her into great prominence," the hopeful critic said, and this was over twenty years ago. I have had the experience all right, but where is the book, and where the prominence? Every year I have said to myself: "Maybe this will be my year of fame," and I feel certain I shall fall into my grave optimistic to the end. But in those days I was full of courage and great confidence, indeed most writers would have been with those lovely criticisms of their work. I felt a new power rising and consuming the timidity and morbid working of my mind. I would show them, the *THEM* being my parents, the girls were not so useless after all. I would prove that the reason I did not care for parties and dancing and all the colourful amusement of social life was because deep down within me a masterpiece was being born, more wonderful maybe than even a human child. Doll would also show them that her eccentricities were only the trappings of real genius. She was going to paint a picture one day the like of which had never before been seen.

Doll thought my stories a little weak. I thought her pictures peculiar, but we were both quite confident that we were above the ordinary. "We mustn't sell our art," Doll would repeat continually. "Let us try and remain individual. It is so easy to vulgarise a theme. For Heaven's sake let us be ourselves even if nobody wants us."

But Doll was not really herself. She took on her friends' personalities, their likes and dislikes, she even went so far as to copy their handwriting. Other people's influences affected her far more than they did me, and she was a faint reflection of her friends. Her devotion to people was deeper

than mine, and when she cared, she cared tremendously, making her life fit round her friends, which flattered them. I often think the reason Doll did not make more of her talent at that time was because she gave too much of herself to others. But when you are young you always imagine there is plenty of time ahead, but, alas, how quickly the future becomes a past, and nothing but old age confronts you. There was I dallying with my short stories, and Doll at the Slade school following the ultra-modern art, both of us so sure of ourselves that time was of no account. I wanted to marry, she did not. Men fascinated me, but she thought they were fools. I used to envy her at the Slade school sitting amongst so many men, but they might have been sacks of coal as far as she was concerned, so unmoved was she by their proximity.

I sent my new book to Bernard Shaw to see what he thought about it, and I received this perfect reply:

"HONOURABLE DAMSEL,

I nearly went down the whole street at the very first go off; but just as I was knocking at number six I was called away; and then the book was seized on and I never got hold of it again until this evening, when I finished it at a gulp. Either it is very wonderful, or, which is more likely, I am beginning to dote. I had notions after my first look at it of your being a sort of Schumann—or Schuwoman, and so saturated with literature and in love with it that you could produce beautiful things without the Beethoven crucifixion and descent into hell. But the stuff seems to be original. I suppose genius is independent of experience. Perhaps a Brett is a new sort of animal like the Okapi, a literary artist ready made . . . there is something in what Wagner said about devoting ourselves to art and waking up to find that we have let life slip by us. I save my own soul, what there is of it, by steadily refusing to be a literary man. . . ."

I valued this letter, it seemed to me so wonderful he should write to me at all. A man of his mentality bothering to pen words to a girl who was only just beginning. But even Lord Morley wrote to me about my book. My opinion of him was lightened by his letter.

"After a heavyish day (he said), I have refreshed my mind with your little pieces. They are very nice; and you will know how to write longer things with a little practice. Stick to it. The gift will come. All good hopes for you.

JOHN MORLEY."

I gathered these letters together and tied them in a bundle. I am afraid I flourished them in front of my family and everyone I met. That I, the unattractive and ungainly should have received such epistles reduced me to a state of unnatural and undesirable conceit. I might so easily have said to myself: "I am very young and this is only my second book. These men are my father's friends, so, of course, they are kind to me." But I did not say these things. Like all rather undersized and inconspicuous people there was within me an inordinate conceit. "At last they have realized," I said to myself, "that looks are not everything. Brain over beauty is the thing that counts in the end." And I hugged myself joyfully and patted myself on the back. But it must be remembered all this happened many years ago.

Lord French wrote to me from Paris. "I have read your charming book with the deepest pleasure and interest," he said. "It is beautifully written and expresses some glorious ideas."

All my happiness seemed to be ahead of me. That such people appreciated my work must surely mean that I was on the ladder to the stars. Well—the ladder has been a long one, and the climb is high. My strength is not what it was, but believe it or not, I am still climbing.

As I may have said before, my little romance was like a shadow at my heels. Sometimes when I was amused or interested, the figure of this man who had said that he loved me lagged so far behind that the shadow was gone. But at other times when I was lonely and embittered, I would see him close to me and hear his shy voice and feel the blueness of his eyes. "What a fool I was," I would say over and over again to

myself. And I would blame my parents, blame Doll, blame even Vyner himself for the way things had come about. Yet it has not been altogether anyone's fault but my own. It was only natural that my parents were nervous of my venturing into a problem that had with its happiness so much that was unhappy. My father imagined me shorn of their protection, alone in a foreign world. He knew very little of the East, but enough to realize that it means separation, it means an unsettled and divided life. It meant a choice between your children and your husband. Never a grouped life. Never a family circle, and a fire-side, and an anchorage that helps you to keep faith. He could not imagine me balanced this way and that, half England and half East. He did not consider I was capable of coping with it. Maybe he was right, but I think if you care sufficiently you can cope with anything; and that was where I was at fault. I did not know then whether I cared enough or not.

Doll would get letters from Vyner nearly every mail. Letters she would snatch to herself with crimson cheeks and curious twisted smile. She would convey that he had written something in these letters intimate and special, but I know now that all he ever wrote to her was about his travels and when he was returning. Sometimes he would mention me, Doll would admit that much, and she would deal out such information she considered I should know. She was careful and considerate in her way, but I always had the feeling she was holding something back. It was an awkward, uncomfortable feeling, and I hated it.

My parents went frequently to London. They were extremely theatre-minded in those days. I think we went almost every Monday night to the *Merry Widow* during the run of its production. The loveliness of Lily Elsie and the extraordinary charm of Joseph Coyne seemed to fascinate my father. He never tired of them, indeed it was impossible to do so. She was the most perfect thing upon the musical comedy stage, impossible to analyse exactly why, but so it was. She had a full, wide face, and an exquisite figure. Her acting was not of the very highest quality, but she could hold a vast audience in her simple hands. And Joe was the complete counterfoil. There was a kind of wistful fun in everything he

did. There is still. It is his way, and they both can have the satisfaction of knowing that nobody has stepped into their shoes, though many have tried. Joe Coyne was one of the earliest Americans ; the invasion to this country had not then begun. His quaint expressions and unusual accent had the lure of novelty and newness. He was the first wave of that enormous sea that has washed over us. It had not then oozed its way into the English blood, into its language, and its life. We had not then made coinage of their words and aped their mannerisms and caught their intonations. We had not become more American than America. We did not exude toughness nor chew gum. Joe Coyne and Edna May were the pioneers, and the Belle of New York was the beauty of London in her time.

Thanks to my parents I knew almost everyone on the stage. Beerbohm Tree with his versatility and his humour, and the great way with him that made him the outstanding personality of all in the then theatrical world. He used to give us his box at His Majesty's Theatre during the Shakespeare cycle, and I would go to every change of programme, sometimes alone, absorbed and fascinated by the beauty of it all. For the Tree productions were not the simple scenery of Shakespeare's time, they were elaborated by all the cunning and the craftsmanship of modern lighting and effect. Tree's Malvolio, his Hamlet, and his King John, his Cardinal Wolsey and his laughing, red-cheeked Falstaff; self-conscious and full of mannerisms, nevertheless there was no one like him. He brought into fame such men and women as Henry Ainley and Oscar Asche, Lily Brayton and Marie L  hr, and so many others who must have reason to be grateful to his name. Maybe I am prejudiced, and, like all ageing people, I am beginning to say: "Ah, my dear, things were so different in my day." But I feel sure I am not wrong in thinking that things were more beautiful and wonderful then than they are now. We did not demand so much. We were content with simpler things. Great artistes were rising whose places have never been refilled. We are clinging still to some of them, but when they go, much of the theatre will vanish with them. Where are the Forbes Robertsons, the Irvings, the Henry Ainleys and the Beerbohm Trees? Where are the Ellen

Terrys, the Lily Braytons, the Marie Löhrs, and Marie Tempests of to-day? How many young ones have emerged and pushed these personalities from the stage? Some of them have died, but those that live have never been unplaced. John Gielgud to my mind is the only one who stands in line with them. Noel Coward has a setting of his own—a brilliant setting of another kind, Ivor Novello has his public by the hand. There are wonderful actresses such as Mary Clare and Gertrude Lawrence. Yet, it is not the same, they are not such monuments of to-day as those others were of theirs. Perhaps it is the material they are handling. Perhaps the film studios are to blame. Maybe Ronald Colman and Clark Gable are the milestones now. Maybe it is arc lights, and faked cities and false shadows that content us too much to make reality worth while. Will the pendulum of time swing back on a return journey to the past, and once again stir up the living drama? I doubt it. The shadow men and women of the screen are all the public need, indeed it is all they can afford to need. If they can feel their hearts beat, if they can laugh and cry for two and fourpence, why should they pay more for their emotions than that? Rapidity of thought and speech and action—our whole beings are wound up to it. The theatre seems slow, the intervals interminable. Musical comedies and music-halls remain. Wherever there are pretty girls there will be men, and wherever there are men there will be other women following them. So time takes its toll of dignity and art. With the downfall of the stately houses, the curtain also falls upon the fine old plays and players. But all this retrospection may only be because my bones are beginning to stiffen and because my blood is thinning in my veins. It may only be because most of us have already lived our lives, and that nearly all of us are vain enough and foolish enough to think it was the only kind of life worth living.

We had two adventures during our theatre session. One was when an extremely young and inexperienced waiter tripped up behind my chair and flung a plate full of tomato soup upon my back. We were at the Savoy Grill, as usual, and I was disporting a brand new evening cloak. I shall always remember the horrible feeling of that boiling substance trickling down my spine; and what a fool I felt as I dripped with tomato from

neck to heel. Of course there was a scene, and Gustave, the head waiter, fussing and furious with apologies. The apprentice, who was no more than a boy, could only stammer that the carpet had rucked up and caught his heel. I said that, of course, it did not matter at all, and left the room in a trail of crushed tomatoes. I went home slowly in the slowest of four-wheelers, changed and sallied forth again to the theatre. All through that play a vapour of cooking vegetable exuded from my person, and I felt those that were next me edging from me and sniffing and looking anxious and perturbed.

The next adventure was my mother's and not mine, a phenomenal happening that has never been explained or understood. It was one night when my mother had returned from the theatre alone, my father, as was his custom, having walked. She had let herself quickly into the house because always when alone she was a little nervous and timid of being followed. Then she went to the back of the room which was screened off from the door and poured herself out a glass of lemonade. I can so easily imagine her standing drawing off her long white gloves, diamonds flashing from her frock, and her face a little anxious as she waited for the sound of his footstep. I can see her lift her head as she heard a noise outside, and the laugh in her large eyes as she moved forward to open the front door. Then I can see her hesitate. Perhaps it was not he; perhaps someone else was trying to get in. She stepped back again, shaking her head and frowning. He had his key, he could let himself in. It was better for her to remain just where she was. Then I can hear the sound of that explosion, and see the heavy mahogany door go flying past her into the wall beyond. I can hear the splintering of wood and crackling of glass, and see the smoke and the fumes lifting and my mother's small figure still standing there, still drawing off her gloves; police pushing their way in, pale, eager faces peering through the open doorway. "I think the boiler has burst," my mother said in her methodical way, although the air was full of dynamite and a yellow juice ran down the walls. When my father eventually turned the corner of the street he saw what had all the appearance of an open-air evening party in front of his house. Tilney Street surged with humanity. Evening frocks, men in immaculate

white shirts, police, pressmen and news-hogs, all elbowing and pushing towards the jagged hole that had once been his beautiful front door. All the windows were broken and exposed, and the curtains fluttered gaily like people waving at the crowds below. A strange homecoming from an ordinary evening at the play.

It was never known why this gigantic bomb had been laid on my father's doorstep, or for whom it had been actually intended. There was a well-known judge who lived next door, or it may have been an act of vengeance from some prisoner my grandfather had condemned and was then free. The fact remained that had the whole bomb exploded instead of only half of it, my father would have found no house at all on his return, and probably no street, and most certainly no wife.

It was not very long after this I heard from the Ranee that Vyner was dangerously ill. He had apparently been out fishing all day in the rain in a small and open boat. Soaked to the skin, he had remained on the river many hours. He loved fishing, and being out alone with his Malays was ■ fascinating pastime. The result had been first a chill and then a deeper danger. An abscess on the liver made him hang between life and death and he had been sent to Singapore in a final attempt to save him. The Ranee was distracted. The son she adored was dying beyond her reach. I know now, I have had children of my own, what kind of a sensation that is. It is beyond weeping, beyond raging against fate. All you can do is to sit and wait and wait for a little envelope that will cable its good news or its bad. I only heard ■ few details from Doll, flung at me in short, sharp sentences, as if it were my fault. She was not encouraging, neither was she loquacious. "I suppose you know Vyner is dying," she announced resentfully at breakfast, ■ if it were owing to me he was in Sarawak at all, and as if I had forced him into that fishing boat and killed him. "He is sure not to get over it—hardly anybody ever does."

I could not help wondering how my parents felt. Were they relieved that this distant menace might no longer reach them, or, now that the years were passing and I was still hanging on their hands unwanted and unwed, were they

regretting that they had not risked the problems of an Eastern marriage and let me go to the only man who had appeared to want me. They said nothing. My father was politely regretful that Vyner was so ill, my mother awkward and unable to express herself. I think perhaps my mother would have spoken to me about it had I not been unrelenting and aloof. I could not help remembering my father grinding a picture to pieces with his heel, and the damage to my little silver drum stood like an accusing sentinel between us.

Thanks to the physical fitness that was his, Vyner did not die, in spite of the conditions and privations of the hospitals out East at that time. Singapore hospital was by no means the up to date and splendid place it is to-day, and as for Sarawak, we had no real hospital at all, and our medical arrangements were primitive and scarce. To-day there stands upon the Rock Road an imposing building, with every modern equipment science can conceive. We are more up to date even than Singapore, and our hospital is one that we may well be proud of. Our men no longer carry their lives in their hands, and our Malays are gaining confidence in seeking treatment. The Witch Doctors have lost their customers, and only the very oldest inhabitants make use of them.

All this talk and anxiety over Vyner reawakened my regret that I had ever let him go. I became restless and moody and the days did not seem to have any meaning at all. Even my writing did not compensate. I would sit at my table biting my pen and frowning and feel immeasurably helpless. But no words would form themselves. I seemed stricken before those pages of white paper. It made me irritable and unpleasant to be with. My parents took me frantically hither and thither in their efforts to amuse me. Every day we lunched at the Savoy, and every night we went out to the theatre. I despised myself so much for not being able to tell them how wonderful I thought it was of them. I should have been grateful; indeed, I would have been had I been in a normal frame of mind—grateful for the noise and the laughter

and the warm happy faces round me. But I saw only myself and my own discontent, and my own longing to *do* something and *be* somebody that mattered.

Then one day Charles Hawtrey walked into the Savoy and sat himself down at a table close to ours. Immediately I became interested and absorbed. Here was a man I fancied I could write a play for. Surely that soft and charming voice could make a success out of almost anything he said. When I went home I began my play. It was only a one-act affair and there were but two characters, Hawtrey himself and a girl. I called my play *The Dream of Iola*, and it was set in the old English library of any house in Mayfair. All round the walls there were shelves and shelves of books. A fireplace and arm-chair and all the accessories of libraries decorated the somewhat sombre room. The girl, Iola Archdale, was a simple maiden of sixteen. As the curtain lifted she was to be discovered reading her Bible. But it was not really a Bible. This simple maiden of sixteen had removed the inner pages of this Holy Work and inserted between the cover her favourite play. The audience were not to be left long in doubt that the actor of this play was the grand passion of this maiden's sixteen years. She held his photograph against her heart. She declaimed aloud the first lines of his play. 'There was a ring at the door bell. The door was opened softly, and lo, a miracle of miracles, Christopher Melrose, the man of her life, stood there.

Then there was supposed to be a subtle little love scene during which the actor disillusioned the girl by kissing her upon the lips. I do not think my heroine was more innocent than I was, when I wrote that one kiss could disillusion any girl, but having had no experience of that enchanting salutation, I attached far more importance to it than was its due. My heroine was horrified. Her dream lay shattered at her feet. The actor left that library feeling unclean and an inhabitant of hell.

I think it speaks well for Hawtrey that he never laughed at me and my ingenuous artlessness. I think he realized how sensitive I was, and how sincere. Had he laughed, I doubt if I would ever have continued writing and trickling into the world a collection of ineffective but not uninteresting

books. Charles Hawtrey treated this heavily sweetened effusion of mine seriously and considerately. But, seeing me sitting at the next table so soon after the playlet had been sent to him, proved too much for his immeasurable sense of humour. The devil entered Hawtrey on that day, and no sooner were we seated than to my horror I saw him push the edge of my miserable manuscript over the top of his table so that I could see what it was he had resting between his hands. The blood rushed to my face, my nose, and down the sides of my neck. I was in an agony that my parents might see this play of which they knew not a thing. I frowned and gesticulated and implored him with my eyes to conceal the incriminating document at once. But Hawtrey only smiled that full bland smile of his and pointed to my play.

I was conscious of my parents whispering and looking extremely annoyed, and I felt sure they were saying to one another that restaurant life had not improved me. They thought quite naturally that I was merely making eyes at this man I did not know, and that I was endeavouring to get to know him in a cheap and obvious way. When Hawtrey had finished his lunch he rose and came over to our table. "I am just going home to read your daughter's play," he said to my bewildered father, and with another smile at me he went away. Of course I was obliged then to explain that I had secretly sent my manuscript to Hawtrey in the hopes that he would accept it and so surprise them. But they were not altogether satisfied with my timid revelation, and for a while my restaurant career was at an end. I was sent to Edinburgh to stay with Zena Dare who was on tour there playing in *The Catch of the Season*, with Seymour Hicks. She was at that time about to be engaged to Maurice to the intense happiness of both my parents. They loved Zena. It did not matter that her marriage to Maurice was sensational and that he was obliged to leave the Guards because of it. They knew somehow that Zena was worthy of all sacrifice, and that in her hands the sulky little boy would be quite safe. It was while I was in Edinburgh that I met the girl who became my greatest friend. She was staying with Zena, and her name was Elsa Levy. I do not know what it was exactly that appealed to me so much about this girl. She had

a funny square face and soft fair hair. She was not pretty, but she had infinite charm and sympathy. I had never had any friends of my own before, and as a rule I did not care for companions of my own sex. I did not trust them or believe in them. They alarmed me really with their superiority and grace. The conversation appalled me. I could not feel natural with any of them, or even remotely at my ease.

But with Elsa it was different. I could talk to her. I could feel secure and safe as long as I was with her. She had the bluest of eyes and crisply curling hair, and there was a brave way with her as if, whatever befell her, she would not and could not feel afraid. I could feel that whatever came her way, good or evil, sorrow or joy, she would meet it with the lovely laugh that was hers, and a shrug of her shoulders, and a funny little toss of her fair hair.

Poor little Elsa Levy. Time drew us apart into lives that were so different. Fate gave to me abundantly, and took away from her. It seemed to me so strange and unbelievable that here were we, two girls exactly alike really, only one was blonde and the other brunette, and yet Fate laid her hand heavily on the fair one's shoulder, and led the dark one, which was me, into a kind of heaven upon earth. When I meet her now the look on that wistful face of hers hurts me so much that sometimes I feel I would rather not see her at all. But she has never complained, never even compared her life to mine. Such is the friend that I chose out of the world to be the greatest anchorage I had.

I enjoyed that week in Edinburgh. It taught me a lot about other people's lives. I saw the stage shorn of its glamour, the footlights dimmed and the curtain drawn. Young girls trudging through wet streets to dim and dirty lodgings. Little actresses without their lighting, cold, tired, and insufficiently clad. I saw the radiance of the stars, the margin that makes the stage good to those who can pass it. Sable coats, warmth, sparkling puppets held in the safe hands of success. They were not real to me, those lucky ones, they were not even real to themselves. They seemed to be forever playing a part, whether upon the stage or off it. Zena in her dressing-room was a fascinating, vivid, human being. But Zena before her public was just whatever her public wanted her

to be. She could turn on a mood like a tap. She could be anything that was asked of her. A brilliant masquerader whose fluttering heart was hidden beneath her glittering clothes, for the real Zena was a very different person shorn of her limelight—equally brilliant, but in a different way. She had brain, and a quick understanding. She wanted to know everything and be somebody outside her own profession. I have always thought that one hour with Zena Dare was worth more than a whole day with most people. Her perfect sense of humour, her voice, her mannerisms, are all so much part of her amazing fascination. The Dare Sisters to the world were glamorous, but behind the world they were just two highly strung, suffering girls, whose feet were aching at the end of every show. How we used to laugh over their aches and pains. What fun we had in those stage dressing-rooms, Elsa and I. We felt we belonged to them all. We loved the life. But then we were not trudging through the mud to a cold lodging. We were in a comfortable hotel.

Then, right into the middle of this Edinburgh visit there came a letter from the man I fancied had forgotten me, telling me he had arrived in England. My heart stood still. I felt sick. I felt breathless as if the firm earth had been suddenly shaken from under my feet. It was a very simple letter, telling me he wanted to see me, and could I meet him anywhere in London.

I sent the letter to my father. I thought to myself: "This time I will not conceal anything. I'll no longer be a 'Parcel' but a person, and no one shall interfere between us any more."

I remember smiling to myself at my father's reply, for it seemed to me that I could hear him saying to my mother: "Syv is getting a bit long in the tooth. Hadn't we better do something about it? Besides, she's old enough to know her own mind by now."

What he actually wrote to me was: "Syv darling, this is a charming letter, he seems a nice fellow, why don't you see him?" Different words, but the meaning was there just the same. My parents realized that I was old enough to understand what an Eastern marriage would mean; the long separations either from your children or from him, the uneasiness of

feeling that whichever you are with, you should be with the other. They also realized that I might not marry, and they knew how much I wanted to. They had no desire to have a disordered spinster on their hands, and it was not for them to discourage any longer the arrival of a man whose persistence had endured for seven years.

I sent a telegram to Vyner telling him that I was returning from Edinburgh that night, and suggesting I should meet him at whatever place he told me. We met at Prince's Restaurant, and we had a strange, shy, lunch together.

A week later we were engaged to be married.

The day Vyner asked me to marry him there was a large hole in my stocking, and he has told me since that this hole horrified him so much he nearly forgot to propose. He was always like that. His sense of humour came between everything he did, depriving it of its severity and reducing whatever purpose he was at to a level of frivolity and fun. It seemed to him so utterly incongruous that a daughter of Lord Esher should have safety-pins in her sleeve cuffs and a large hole in the heel of her silk stocking.

The excitement over our engagement was tremendous. Posters and headlines everywhere. It was a garden of roses to the Press, and they wallowed in it. I was portrayed as a girl of almost every nationality. "The future Ranee Muda of Sarawak," one paper said, "is a girl of American ancestry, and she will one day occupy an oriental throne." "A Quaker girl," another paper named me, "will marry an Eastern monarch's son. . . ." I was Scotch, I was Belgian, I was French—Jewish blood lay somewhere deep within me. It had never occurred to me before how amazingly un-English was my origin. No wonder I was moody and inclined to be unstrung with all that mixture coursing through my veins.

If anyone were to ask me what I remembered most about my engagement, my reply would be: "The little house in South Ascot, the blue chair that was the Ranee's chair, wreaths of pale smoke passing across the proud and beautifully

animated face, the scent of violets, splashes of colour and half-oriental lamps. And beside her the man I was about to marry, and the blueness of their eyes and the great likeness they had to one another."

The Ranee did not attempt to conceal her elation. She spoilt and petted me and did everything she could to make me feel that I was welcome. But my friends wrote careful letters of congratulation—they were not quite certain what this wild man from Borneo really was. Those who had not studied their geography imagined he was an Indian, and that I was to live in a Calcutta harem, or on Malabar Hill, Bombay. Those who knew even less believed I was being wed to an Ethiopian. They looked at me askance and almost shuddered. Others said what an adventure it would be to rule over savages. I cannot help smiling when I picture what the Sarawak people really are, and how ridiculously wrong they were in their conjectures.

Sir John French was the first to write to me. We had talked so often, he and I, on whom I should marry if indeed I ever married at all.

"MY DEAR SYLVIA (he said), I would have written before but I have had such a head (not drink, but cold) that I simply couldn't. You know *all* I wish you. I am sure you will make any good man happy, and be a treasure beyond praise to him. I shall, however, always value the position of the Honorary Rank (on Retirement) of 'One of those.' With the most fervent good wishes, I am, dear Sylvia, always aff.

FRENCH."

The "One of those" referred to meant the men I had loved up to that time. There were not many, but he resented anyone but himself being on that list. Over and over again he would try and put me off someone by suggesting certain faults that he possessed.

"Why won't I do?" he would say, his blue eyes twinkling. "Why have any other friend? I can assure you it is really a waste of time." But he was always "One of those"—I could not condense my affection to one man. "It has taken me years

to make friends with anyone," I told him. "Do you think I am going to let them go? I need friends. Every woman does. They are the crutches to one's old age, the only strong supports we have to lean on."

Sir Ian Hamilton wrote to me from Malta:

"And so, my dear little Lady, the murder is out (he said). Truly you should be ashamed of yourself. The only possible excuse is that your fraud never deceived. No—looking into my own manly breast I *knew* you were not 'left,' but that you were all 'right.' My only curiosity (and that I confess was considerable), was to know the particular mouse you were playing with.

And so now you are to be a Princess. Well, never will that style and title find itself more suitably centred than in you. I wish I could see you to express in words and by a warm grasp of the hand how much I wish you good fortune and joy. Good-bye, my dear, for the present. All good angels watch over you.

Yours sincerely,

IAN HAMILTON."

It was arranged that after the wedding we should spend two or three days at Nuneham Park—the lovely property of Loulou Harcourt. His letter to me on my engagement was characteristic of the man.

"MY DEAR SQUIV,

I am delighted at your engagement, for though I don't know him I am sure he is nice if you like him: you have a genius for liking nice people—you used to like me. I think he is a devilish lucky fellow and I shall tell him so at the first opportunity."

But the man whose letter I valued most was Bernard Shaw's. The literary imp of mischief who could make classics out of commonplace remarks. I think I wrote to him and J. M. Barrie before my engagement was announced, giving them full warning of what was to become of me. G. B. S. replied as follows:

" . . . I am not at all pleased to hear that you are in love with somebody. You ought to be in love with me—that is the usual thing, and I think the proper thing at your age. I hope the other fellow is married or in some other way put on a high shelf, because it is not wise to marry a man you love; it makes you a slave and a nuisance; and the poor wretch cannot live up to it, whereas if you marry somebody else you have a husband with whom you can be at your ease, and you have your dream all the same without ever waking. There should always be Another. He will keep well if you take care to keep him imaginary. Your husband can have Another too, on the same conditions. As long as he is any sort of a decent fellow, one husband is as good as another. It takes six years to learn to live together, and get over the most furious fits of wishing you hadn't married him, and hating him; but after that he becomes a habit and a property, and you stop bothering about it.

You are quite right about old buffers being the most interesting. When I was your age I wouldn't look at a woman under forty. I defy you to find a young man half as interesting as I am. But you cannot enter into enduring relations with old people. Just think of it; I am just thirty years older than you. I was forty-four when you were fourteen. We should have met then. I was still beautiful. Now you are twenty-four (unless that is a whopper of yours), and I am fifty-four. Relations are still possible, if a little forcedly paternal on my side. At thirty-four you will be much more businesslike; and I will be sixty-four. Well, what of that? Goethe was a fine man and Ibsen a crusty one at that age. At forty-four you will be in your prime: a splendid female. I will—I mean I shall—be seventy-four. You will give instructions that you are to be not at home when I call, though you will be very kind when we meet and you can't avoid me. At fifty-four you will have begun a new, active, and interesting part of your life; and when someone tells you she saw me yesterday you will say: 'Good Heavens! Is that old creature still alive? Why, I was at the theatre with him thirty years ago, and he was an old man then. He must be over ninety.'

You must be provident in these matters. People are always changing into something else: that is why enduring relationships are such chancy things. You will have to pick some unripe young man who will disagree with you; but then you are unripe yourself and will disagree with him. You really ought to have got it over and laid in ■ lapful of babies by this time. After that, nothing matters; one settles down to business and realities. But here again you have to look ahead. Children grow up, and then they want Mothers, not Grandmothers. . . . Don't you go imagining things if I don't write. I ought never to write a line outside my work. If you could read shorthand, like my secretary, I could send you reams: ■ it is, my wife watches me jealously every time I take out my pen. Not from jealousy of you, but from jealousy of my health, for she knows it is bad for me to write after dinner, which is just what I am doing now, so I shall stop.

To Sylvia.

G. B. S."

I had not known or realized before I became engaged how genuine and real my few friends were. It is a strange thing about life, you can jog along for years, in a kind of resigned lethargy, and then quite suddenly something happens and you wake up with a jerk and see confronting you a new road that you must traverse alone. It is then that you are grateful for those who stand by you: glad that after all if was you they cared for, you yourself and not only your family. Especially hard was it for us to believe that anyone even noticed our existence when we were overwhelmed by the shadow of my father's genius. It was only natural that these great men and women should come down to our house just to see him. Yet, in spite of it, J. M. Barrie, Lord French, and Bernard Shaw kept a little of themselves in reserve for me.

My father held a theory about marriage. To him it meant the cutting away completely of a branch of the family tree. "If a boy marries," he would say, "he brings his wife into his own family. If a girl marries, the man she marries takes her away from her family for ever, into his."

"What you really mean is," I would reply bitterly, "that you want Maurice but you do not want me."

But this was childish argument, and I knew it really. I knew that his theory was right and I was wrong. "Wives cleave unto your husbands . . . walk into your husband's family and leave your own behind. It is his life now, not yours. Serve two masters and you serve neither of them well."

I knew this deep down in my heart was true. But to believe a thing and to be told it are two different aspects. I thought my father heartless and unkind. All my old jealousy rose up to the surface. I remember Lord French agreeing with my father, and how furiously miserable I was. "Your father is right," he told me, his blue eyes twinkling into mine. "Once you marry, out you go, neck and crop. You won't see anything of all this again, and when you do come down here your old home will seem strange to you because your whole life is filled up by the new one. You get out of touch," he added slowly. "That is all it really means. Environment—everything, is different."

The banns of our marriage were published in the parish church of Braywood. It all seemed fantastic and unreal to me. Frocks and frills and forever shopping was the prelude to this great change in my life. I seemed to be passing in a crowd of strangers from my old life to my new. I was in reality but half awake. Silks, satins, lingerie and lace were strewn before me. I looked down at my simple self and I could not believe it possible that this girl who a few weeks ago had been obscure and undesirable was the much-talked-of Sylvia Brett, spinster, of Cranborne Parish, engaged to a Rajah's son.

I think it is only fair that I should give a light pen-picture of the man I was about to marry.

Charles Vyner De Windt Brooke was born in Albemarle Street, London, on September 26th, 1874. Two years after this event the Ranee took him on his first voyage to Sarawak, where his brother, Bertram, or Adeh as he was known, was born.

Amongst the many paintings of Sarawak in Kew Palace

by Miss Marianne North, there is a sketch of the little Rajah Muda in a white frock and a broad blue sash playing beneath a tree with his native amah. A sketch I have so much longed to possess.

When Vyner was twelve years old he once more visited Sarawak, accompanied by both his brothers, Adeh and Harry, and when he was seventeen he paid his third visit, after which he did not go out again until some six years later.

I have often wondered what impressions these journeys left upon his growing mind; all I do know is that he seemed to me to stand out from other men who had not travelled so far afield at such an early age.

He was educated at Winchester and Cambridge, but his home life during those early days was of the simplest. There were three things he always remembered as delighting him. One was painting the number on the front door of their little lodgings; another was to go into the gallery of a theatre and spit on to the rich people below; the other, but by no means the least of these delights, was that twice a week only—in case the fearsome joy of it should wane—he was allowed to go down to Earl's Court Station and see the trains draw up and disgorge their motley passengers, or else rush by like steaming dragons emitting wild shrieks of ecstasy at the pale people seated so humbly in the bellies of them.

I am mentioning this in order to convey how heavily the burden of debt lay upon the shoulders of Sarawak at that time, and how difficult were the days when my father- and mother-in-law ruled. Their three little boys were delicate, especially Vyner, who suffered considerably and continually from ear trouble. He was at school when bullying was rampant, and I cannot remember how often he has told me he had been "roasted." Roasting consisted of holding a boy closely over the fire with his trousers pulled so tightly round him that it would seem his actual body was on fire. They fired peanuts into his open mouth, they boxed his ears if they knew he had an abscess until it burst. While he was still at Winchester Harry arrived there, a trembling, white-faced little boy whose bootlaces were always undone and whose nose was always bleeding. Vyner protected this minute brother of his and would not allow him to be touched. From Winchester he



Ray Wrightson

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW



MY FATHER-IN-LAW



THE ASTANA, SARAWAK

went to Cambridge and joined good-humouredly into any escapade. I have visited Cambridge since and been to his College, where I was shown with pride the glass window that commemorated his time there. I was shown the little staircase with the marks in it made, I was told, by Rajah Brooke and his friends making their perilous and uncertain passage to their rooms. I believe I am right in saying that it was Vyner who drove a coach down the middle of Cambridge High Street. He was also mixed up in a street fight with some navvies, and strong as he was at that time, they managed to knock him down. The last thing he could remember of that fight was a rough voice saying: "Kick him in the ribs, Bill" and the first three kicks . . . and that was all.

At the age of twenty-three he was taken straight from the glamour of a Cambridge student's life and plunged into a little outstation in Sarawak called Simanggang. There, with but two other Europeans as companions, he commenced his life's work in the same manner as a newly joined cadet would do on joining the Sarawak Service, that is to say, he acted as a kind of clerk, sticking stamps on other people's letters and sorting documents he had not written. Later he was raised to the dignity of doling out castor oil or vaccinating Dyak babies. It is not difficult to imagine how bewildered he must have been when he first settled down amongst these people whose language he could not understand or speak, and what a contrast it must have been to him who had led a somewhat hectic and uproarious college life.

But although the Rajah's school was a hard one there was justice in it, and wisdom, and immense foresight. He realized well what an advantage it would be for this son to be fully equipped with a knowledge of all the little things that might so easily have passed him by, when, in the fullness of time, he should come into his great heritage.

Vyner also had his share of warfare in Sarawak. On May 3rd, 1900, whilst he was Rajah Muda, he went on an expedition against the Muruts of Trusan. Now the leader of these Muruts was Okong, who for years had been hostile to the Sarawak Government, and had done to death many inhabitants of the interior. He was a dangerous and unscrupulous chief, and kept those who were peacefully disposed from

earning an honest and an upright livelihood, levying a form of blackmail on the unfortunate people who tried to trade there. His country was up the Trusan River, which flows between the Limbang and Lawas Rivers, six days above the Fort. Okong's strength in numbers consisted of fifteen houses, and the Expeditionary Force against him numbered eight hundred men. This force was under the command of Mr. O. F. Ricketts, the then Resident of Limbang, and besides Vyner, who had risen to the post of Resident of Sibü, there was Mr. P. F. Cunynghame, Assistant Resident, and Mr. A. W. Cox, Resident of Trusan. The expedition was a hard one, necessitating long marches over the most mountainous passes, and was perhaps the most trying for Vyner himself, who had not been in the country more than three years. The bad state of the paths, the steepness and often almost impenetrable swamps, made progress difficult and slow. But eventually, by the aid of search parties, and after sundry small attacks in which Vyner conquered, Cronjee, as they nicknamed Mr. Ricketts, and his party reached the enemy's village.

Now warfare in Sarawak is not as an ordinary open war; it is a kind of cat-and-mouse proceeding, in which men stalk their prey for many hours, and springing . . . find them gone. It is a test of patience and endurance in a country where each crackling of a leaf is like a pistol shot upon the weakened nerves of men. It means unlimited high spirits and the calling up of all that is best in human nature. As a rule these weeks of marching have all ended in vain—either the party has had to turn back owing to disease, or else when at last they reach their destination they find the villages deserted and the property removed. Okong had removed himself but not his possessions, and the expedition had the satisfaction of burning all his houses, six in number, and looting all his things. Then once more the weary march home—the heat—the mosquitoes, and enervating climbs. Mr. Ricketts reported that the expedition had exceeded expectations, that there had been little sickness, and the whole party had kept up their spirits until the end. This may in itself sound a trivial affair, but in the East, where movement is a torment, it means much in the characters of men.

Two years after this came what is known as the Cholera

Expedition. A happening full of gruesome horror, a kind of nightmare that may haunt the dreams of youth but never be conceived as a reality. Yet it was real enough to Vyner and to those others who took part in it. And it is as vivid in their memories as if it had happened yesterday and not many years ago.

Vyner was at that time Resident at Muka, and on June 9th, 1902, his father issued an order for an expedition to attack the Ulu Ai Dyaks at the mouth of the Delok, for a series of raids on neighbouring tribes. This expedition was to be led by Mr. Deshon, Resident of Kuching, and accompanied by Vyner and Mr. Bailey, Resident of the 2nd Division. The party were to assemble at Simanggang, the little out-station Vyner had first worked in. During the only night they slept there two men died suddenly and mysteriously beneath Vyner's bedroom in his bungalow. Vyner reported the next morning that he thought that it was cholera, but his father would not listen. I think this event proves more than any other what an unscrupulous and inhuman man this second Rajah of Sarawak was. He was warned by everyone that cholera had broken out, but he refused to listen. His plans came first. He insisted that they should be carried through. Without a tremor he sent his eldest son to an almost certain death. The expedition started forth with this scourge of cholera amongst them.

Several men died as they went up river—died suddenly and horribly—yet the fear of an actual epidemic had not then spread beyond what was in Vyner's mind. Then things became suddenly so bad that they were obliged to turn and make their painful and laborious way back to where they had come from. Out of a force of ten thousand men, two thousand died of cholera. In a few hours the country that had been so beautiful became distorted and disfigured by little mounds of dead lying in the beaten grass. Where they died they fell in huddled and grotesque positions. Boats floated up with limp limbs hanging in the water. And through it all Vyner and this little band of Englishmen kept up their spirits, although they saw in each other's eyes the look as if they were asking one another: "Will it be your turn next, or mine?" They never even remotely imagined that any one of them would return

alive. And all the time the natives squatted round them in mute appeal until they in their turn were stricken, and they held themselves tightly with claw-like hands, and rolled screaming down the grass slopes into the swiftly flowing stream below.

As they made their way back to Simanggang there was little noise but the splash of the dead bodies as they threw them overboard. Some of the men thought to be beyond help returned after a few days, having been washed up to the land. Others who had but been lightly buried revived and fought their way into the open air. And all the time hundreds and thousands of flies droned from the dead to the living, spreading the scourge and filling the unwholesome space.

At Simanggang more and yet more died. It seemed at one time as if these Englishmen would be the only three men left. There was no medicine—nothing—with which to help, only a dresser called Sengene who worked with untiring courage to relieve all that he could.

What an expedition for a young man not long from Cambridge. What a memory to carry with him through the remainder of his life. Although only two men died in Vyner's boat, when he reached Simanggang he could have walked for miles and miles upon dead bodies. These were eventually piled up in heaps and burned. Vyner has often described to me since how, when he walked from the Bazaar in the evenings, he would come upon these ghastly mounds waiting for the fire to consume them. The atmosphere was sickening and terrible, and there was no stirring of wind to carry it away. The news of this tragic expedition reached England, and one evening paper more venturesome than the rest went so far as to announce that Vyner had died of this disease, and published a picture of his swollen body floating down the stream. You can imagine what effect this report had upon the Ranee, who, so many years before, had seen her family of three small children swept from before her eyes by cholera. Of course the report was contradicted in the morning, but the Ranee has never forgotten to this day the agony she went through.

This epidemic spread eventually all over Sarawak, reaching even as far as Kuching. But the amazing part of the thing was that through it all not one single European died.

Such was the man I was about to marry, and such had been his life. It is only an outlined portrait of him, but it will convey a picture of something and somebody different from the ordinary routine. It will explain how wide a bridge there was for me to traverse between my life and his.

As the wedding day drew nearer the newspapers became once more filled with my affairs. They had discovered that I was a grandchild of the Sylvain Van de Weyer whose statue now stands in Louvain, where he was born. Sylvain Van de Weyer, when he was quite a young man, became Librarian of the famous library of Louvain, which has since been destroyed by fire in the Great War. He then became Minister of the Interior in Belgium, and was sent to England as the personal representative of Queen Victoria's uncle, Leopold the First. Afterwards he became the Belgian Minister in England, and it was he who, when being presented to Queen Victoria, was announced as the Belgian Ambassador, and whispered to her as he passed: "Pas encore, Madame." His wife was the only daughter of Joshua Bates of Boston, the American partner of the great banking house of Baring. Joshua Bates spent a portion of each year in London, and had a most picturesque, historic and hospitable home at Twickenham on the Thames, known as Shene House. It was there that all those distinguished Americans who visited England during the first thirty years of the Victorian era were enabled to meet the leading men of Britain.

I began to know more about myself and who I was and why I was. Until then I had taken myself more or less for granted. You see, I was not ancestor-minded, and I cannot say that I am particularly so now, but it did interest me to see where America came into our blood and where Belgium and where Scotland. The mixture amused me, and I was grateful to my parents for not being purely of one race.

Maurice also occupied a prominent position in the Press, for he had been married to Zena, and the dream of his life had been realized at last. He had resigned from the Coldstream

Guards in consequence of this marriage, and Society and the Smart Set whispered and nudged and raised astonished eyebrows. It seems so extraordinary now, when the stage has ceased to be a bottomless pit of iniquity and become the sanctuary of so many who are exalted and of noble rank, that such a clamour of comment and of talk should have followed in my brother's trail. Society was shocked. They deplored my father's magnanimity and my mother's genuine appreciation of this footlight favourite, whose glamorous features adorned every postcard shop in London. I was too occupied with my own approaching marriage to concern myself with what Maurice had done, but I was infinitely glad that it was Zena, with her amazing beauty and her exceptional charm.

Oliver was in New York, and rumours had just begun to reach us that he too had found his anchorage. All of us except Doll. How my heart would ache when I thought that she out of all of us should have been left out. Yet—she was so proudly and gloriously independent. She did not wish to be tied down. She was the pioneer of feminine emancipation which has now become rampant amongst the ranks of youth.

Before my wedding I went to stay for a week-end with the Loulou Harcourts, and there I met Mr. Asquith amongst the guests. If it had not been for him my visit would have been a lamentable one. The house was filled with young people who all knew each other so intimately that I seemed like a stranger in their midst. Boating parties were arranged, and in the morning everyone scattered into punts and canoes, and as usual I was left out. Mr. Asquith, who had a heart of gold, took pity on me and we went into a little summer-house in the garden, and there we discussed life and literature and the art of writing. Why I remember this so clearly is that he said to me: "When I prepare a speech I sit in a room packed full of information. Have your facts at your elbow. Have everything round you, dictionaries, dates and quotations, and above all," he added, "have a thesaurus. Never use a word more than once. If you do it lessens its strength. The English language, you must always remember, will sound like an organ, if properly played."

And so we sat on and talked until we were about an hour late for lunch, and we were obliged to enter that crowded

dining-room with innumerable hostile eyes questioning and staring.

Wedding presents began to roll in. It seemed to me that I was being given everything: jewellery, beautiful *objets d'art*, furniture, silver, lace and linen. King George and Queen Mary gave me a blue enamel diamond and pearl brooch bearing their combined cyphers surmounted by the Imperial crown. Queen Alexandra gave me a brooch with her name written in enamel and diamonds. I was overwhelmed by the magnificence of my presents, and every time I opened a parcel I kept saying: "This can't be me, this can't possibly be me."

Then at last our wedding day approached so near that Vyner and I became panic-stricken. He was particularly shy of any form of publicity, and in spite of the fact that ours was to be a country wedding it had not lessened the enthusiasm of the Press.

My wedding dress was, of course, of ivory satin—not the most becoming attire for one of my sallow complexion. It was a lovely frock, and it had been made by the Misses Wighton, two little dressmakers who were very old friends of my mother's, and who lived in Tite Street, Chelsea. I was to wear a wreath of real orange blossom under my veil and to carry a spray of snow-white lilies in my arms. It was an extraordinary feeling putting on that dress. It was as if my brain had emptied, and I seemed to stand outside myself watching myself get ready. And between me and the girl that was putting on her bridal gown there stood the shadow of the suppressed and morbid child I had been, saying: "I am still here: still with you. You won't be able to throw me off—not ever. I belong to you body and soul."

Vyner and I were married at St. Peter's Church, Cranborne, on rather a bleak-looking Tuesday in February. It was not a becoming day, and I was conscious that my face was yellow and my elbows were red. J. M. Barrie came up to my room as soon as I was dressed because he said he wanted to be the very first to kiss the bride.

The rest seemed like a dream in which I could not even feel myself moving. I know we passed along a guard of honour of Boy Scouts and a throng of excited and interested villagers. I know it was all very pretty and simple and countrified, and

would have been perfect had it taken place in summer. I remember passing from my father's confident arm to the side of my trembling bridegroom. It was easy for my father to be at peace with all mankind, he was not taking me on for life and for better or for worse.

When we returned from the church my father found a telegram from Queen Alexandra which was sent from Sandringham, and ran as follows: "Too sorry never to have known when your dear little daughter's marriage took place but you never announced it so can only now wish her all possible happiness and ask you to forward my small wedding gift. Alexandra." There was also a letter for me from Charles Hawtrey to say that he was sorry he could not come but that it had been sweet of me to remember him. It was enclosed in a parcel that contained a beautifully embroidered blotter.

The reception at Orchard Lea was a masterpiece of organisation. An immense marquee had been built out into the garden by the Savoy Hotel, and they also provided the waiters and the food. There were so many amusing incidents, the little happenings that I suppose must always be at weddings, but the two that have remained in my memory were these. The Rajah had been dragged most unwillingly to the marriage of his eldest son, and it was with more reluctance still that he attended the reception. He had never met my father, and he had no idea which out of all these men was his host. All he did know was that he was hating the whole affair and wanted to go. He turned to the first man he saw and said furiously: "How can I get out of this damned house?" and the man, who of course was my father, was so astonished that he meekly showed him the door.

The second incident was when we started to change into our "going away" costumes. It did not take me long to get ready, but Vyner seemed to have completely disappeared. The guests became uneasy and awkward, and one or two tried to be funny and said that of course he had run away. At last the resonant voice of a waiter broke through the babble of talk and seemed to boom into our midst; "The Rajah Muda has lost his trousers," it said, and a kind of echoing whisper went round the room. "His trousers are lost! His trousers

are lost!" Eventually he emerged very red in the face, and confused, having found the missing garment in one of the spare rooms, and amidst a shower of rose petals we left in a lovely car which Vyner had given me, for Oxford.

We drove straight to Nuneham Park, which had been lent to us by Loulou, and there, amidst an inquisitive butler and maids, we spent the first three days of our married life. Then, accompanied by a valet and a maid called "Douglas," we left for Italy.

We did Italy thoroughly on this honeymoon of ours. Vyner had lived in Genoa when he was young, so he knew that in Rome one must do as Romans do. I shall never forget our first drive round in Genoa. We had an open carriage and two startled looking horses who galloped along the dust-clad roads with their harness tied on with bits of string. They galloped all the way. Hairpin bends and steep hills up and down. Cactus of immense size jutting out from the walls, and brilliant and scented flowers everywhere. Such was the Genoa I saw on that perilous drive, and it was all framed in a sky of the deepest blue. Then we passed on from there and went to Rome. Vyner was an enthusiastic sightseer. He had a guide-book he had brought from England that must have been at least fifty years old. It told us to go to museums that long ago had been converted into lodgings. No information that it imparted to us was correct. This amused Vyner enormously. He said we were doing Rome as it used to be as well as what it was to-day. But I had honeymoon shoes on, and my feet were on fire, and I could not see the joke.

We recognized some of the statues that had been at Orchard Lea, the originals of the "Boy with the Thorn" and a standing figure of "Narcissus." I loved seeing these. They seemed to be a link between me and my old life. It is a strange feeling when your home goes from under your feet, and you have not had time to grow accustomed to your new one.

Vyner had an amazing knowledge of statues and of art, but he was diffident and modest and would pretend that he knew nothing. This flippant light-heartedness of his has been his strongest weapon all through his life. No one has ever really known Vyner, and no one ever really will.

In the evenings we would drive to the Pinchio and sit and

watch the lights of Rome being slowly lit. It was a place for children to play in and lovers to meet, and old folk to sit hand in hand, and Vyner and I would find endless amusement in guessing the lives of the people who would come there. When we went back to the hotel we were exhausted. We felt as if we would never look at another work of art in our lives. But Vyner had brought with him a little book of jokes, and he would learn a few by heart when he was dressing for dinner and regale me with them at intervals during the meal. I can laugh now over everything that happened, but I was so absurdly serious then. I was full of Rhoda Broughton and Edna Lyall, and I took my ideas of a honeymoon and marriage from the pages of their books. A prude? Oh yes, the most pretentious and unnatural mock modesty obsessed me, and I could not shake it off. I was shocked at Vyner's frankness of expression, and the way he could laugh at things that in my family had only been spoken of with bated breath. Those who live in London and in small towns seem to narrow their natures according to the width of the street they live in, and I had allowed myself to walk one way only, not looking either to the right or to the left. Vyner had travelled over many seas. His outlook encompassed half the world. He could not be upset by anything, he had heard too much and seen too much. I had seen nothing beyond myself and my own emotions; infantile, foolish emotions that were not real.

Vyner was at his best at railway stations. He never lost his temper over luggage, he never minded missing a train. I had been accustomed to my father's well regulated system of excursion, when seats were booked days ahead, and tickets taken, and everything mapped out to time. This was not Vyner's way. He would sit contented and smiling on a platform, and just wait for trains that happened to be going his way. He never used a time-table. "A train is bound to turn up," he would cheerfully announce. "I mean to say they must go our way some time or other," and there we would remain looking indescribably foolish, with trains rushing by on every line except ours.

He never arranged to do anything, and I never knew where we were going when we started out. Sometimes he would take me on a long country walk when I was in high-heeled

shoes, and at other times I would find myself in an art gallery in hobnailed boots. It was impossible to be annoyed, he did everything in such high good-humour, and however uncomfortable I was, I could not dispute that. "Aren't you glad you came, darling?" he would say, after I had panted after him up stone stairs and along stone corridors, where endless lines of pictures hung. And how could I say that I was not, and spoil the glamour of those lovely afternoons? How could I say that I was tired and hot and weary, and that I did not appreciate Italian art?

From Rome we went to Sorrento. There was magic in Sorrento. We lived in a little hotel that hung breathlessly over the side of a cliff. It was so covered with flowers and creepers that I could hardly look through them from my window. Those were wonderful days. Days splashed with sun. Days never to be forgotten. The turn in the white road, the high walls with cactus and the rock plants clinging to them, the sea like a blue apron covering the distance and the sky like a blue veil over our heads. It was a dream place and I loved it. Every morning a little dwarf with a guitar would sing beneath my window. He had a full, clear, tenor voice, and he sang all the songs that I remembered. I could close my eyes and see Caruso, winking at us across the Opera footlights. I could re-live *La Bohème* and *Madame Butterfly*, and feel myself again. Melodies make memories so clear when they are half forgotten, and one song can turn back the clock and be half sweet but wholly sad.

I did not really care for Italy or the Italians. Although their beauty was remarkable, they were a nuisance in the streets. I was pinched if I lingered outside shops, and I was pinched again climbing the dome of St. Peter's. I suppose it was harmless but I hated it. It seemed to me humiliating and cheap.

Then we went to Venice. It was cold and bleak. The gondolas were romantic in their way, but the motor-boats ruined the romance. I saw an old lady with a parasol flung from her gondola by the wash of a motor-boat. Hooters screamed through the canals. It seemed to me that progression should never have been allowed to enter those mysterious and noiseless streets.

I began to feel very ill in Venice, and sometimes it seemed as if I almost hated Vyner. I could not imagine what was the matter with me. I was irritable and tearful and depressed. There was not a thing Vyner could do that did not annoy me and upset me. I began to think my marriage was a failure, and then I overheard two women in the hotel discussing us in French. I heard them say that I was going to have a baby, and I saw them smile as they added something about a too long honeymoon. We left very soon after that for England.

On our return from Italy we went straight to our new home called Stanton Harcourt. It was a square, cool house with high rooms in it that opened out on to stretches of shadowed green lawns. There we lived a contented country life. It took us several weeks to get unpacked and properly settled, and it was the greatest possible fun playing doll's house, and arranging all our things. I found three letters waiting for me, one from Mr. Asquith, one from J. M. Barrie, and one from Bernard Shaw. Mr. Asquith's was written from Lympne Castle, Lympne, Kent, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR RANEE,

(If that is the proper and respectful way of addressing you.) Thank you very much for your letter. It is true that our actual acquaintance was hardly longer than that of ships that pass in the night, but I have always kept the memory of it, and looked out for tidings of your voyages. I see from your change of name that you have put into one Port, where I hope you have found peace and prosperity.

With every good wish,

Your sincere friend,

H. H. ASQUITH."

J. M. Barrie said:

"It is delightful to hear you are so happy. It was delightful to me on your wedding day to see you so nice

to everyone, especially to servants and waiters. I think the latter such a test of a nice woman, and I watched, and no one could have come more sweetly thro' the ordeal. I think you will be idolized at Sarawak, and we shall hear of most romantic devotion on the part of dusky natives . . . all affectionate greetings to you both.

Always yours,
J. M. BARRIE."

The letter from G. B. S. was very different. I could almost see the three men writing them. Mr. Asquith with his square and kindly face, and J. M. Barrie, shy and apart. And then Bernard Shaw with his stimulating personality, rocking himself from side to side and chuckling. He wrote from his flat in Adelphi Terrace, and he started the letter thus:

"Ride a cock horse
To Sarawak Cross
To see a young Ranee consumed with remorse.
She'll have bells on her fingers
And rings through her nose,
And won't be permitted to wear any clo'es.

I don't know what you call it, Sylvia, but I call it simple unfaithfulness.

For 'tis oh my heart is left, lady
To find myself bereft, lady
Of Sylvia, my left lady
By a heathen potentate.

Ought to be ashamed of yourself *you* ought. Look here—will you come to lunch at half-past one on Friday (day after to-morrow), and bring the heathen potentate? You should introduce him to the intellectual side of London. I mean, of course, to *ME*. I know the notice is short, but I couldn't help it. Tell the boy Yes or No; preferably Yes. You can leave the potentate behind if he is bashful or otherwise engaged.

G. B. S."

These letters cheered me considerably because I felt I had

not quite lost touch with my old life. Even the little time I had been married I had learned the truth of my father's belief; ■ wife must enter her husband's life for he will not venture into hers. If a man is wise he will close the door against his wife's past, and open a future for her from which she will never wish to return.

Vyner and I absorbed ourselves in our garden. We went for long drives and sometimes he played cricket with the village team. He eventually formed a team of his own and started ■ reading and recreation club for them. I would find myself sitting and watching a game I knew absolutely nothing about, or else, side by side with the Vicar, serving out cricket teas. Vyner was a nervous player. He was a far better bat than any of them, but his extreme shyness prevented him making all the runs that he should have. He was extremely popular in the village, and he would often sit in the little club ■ had started and discuss their political views, and draw the men out about their private lives. Sometimes he would go out shooting rabbits and I would sit and knit on the roadside waiting for him. The strange part about these expeditions was that although I seldom heard a single shot fired, he never returned with less than two rabbits. I used to laugh at him and say that I was sure he had clubbed them over the head with the butt end of his gun, and upon my soul, by his dishevelled condition and the torn edges of his blood-stained trousers, and the dilapidated state of the rabbits, I am still not quite certain that this was not the case.

We had a lake with a little island in the middle of it, and I had a wonderful inspiration that I would turn this island into a kind of wild animal sanctuary. I could reach it in a boat and I started my sanctuary by letting loose two guinea-pigs. I was thrilled over the idea, and I imagined my island swarming with various livestock that I had rescued from cruelly cramped shops in every town. But alas, when I went to visit the guinea-pigs the next morning, two little headless bodies lay stretched upon the ground. A weasel had selected its abode somewhere amongst the tangled underwood. My sanctuary was at an end.

Vyner created a beautiful garden at Stanton Harcourt

that became in time a show garden, and people would come from Oxford and miles round to see it. Loulou Harcourt would bring his house parties from Nuneham, and they would all arrive in such alarmingly smart clothes that Vyner and I would feel like the gardener and his wife showing them round the estate. Indeed, Vyner was actually taken for the gardener by one over-zealous peer who pressed half a crown confidentially into his hand on departing.

Vyner seemed to have a natural genius for designing gardens. He knew the name of almost every plant. There were beds like broad ribbons running across the green lawns, and these beds were filled with iris of every colour and size. There were roses and rock plants and every kind of bog plant round and about the lake. No wonder people motored for miles to see it. There was not a garden to equal it anywhere round about.

I seemed to be living in a state of bewildered happiness. I still yearned for things unattainable such as fame, or some tremendous achievement that would electrify the world. But I felt too unwell to work. I could not form ideas, and my imagination was at a standstill. All I could do was to move about mechanically because I knew that it was bad for me to sit still. I was happier than ever I had been before. But I was restless. I felt that I was wasting my time in a way, and losing valuable ground. My books had just begun to be heard of. People were aware that I did write books. This inactivity enabled them to forget me, and I knew I should have to begin all over again. My mind seemed to be leaping ahead of me, so that I, in my effort to follow it, missed what was going on round me. It is an awful thing to look too far ahead. It sends you breathlessly into the future before you have given the present a chance; and in the end you find yourself looking back over great gaps of your life that are void of all movement and thought. I have always been like this. I have never been able to really enjoy a day because of the wondering of what is to come after it.

When the time approached for my baby to be born, I wrote and told my two greatest friends, J. M. Barrie and Bernard Shaw, and the letters they wrote in reply were typical and charming.

"MY DEAR SYLVIA,

I feel so sure next week is going to be a cruel week for you and for all who care for you. You may imagine a small and most select company enthroned outside your doorsteps waiting for Vyner (looking a little ridiculous) to give the signal. How we shall resist a disturbing cheer I don't know, but it has got to be done.

All blessings to you. I so eagerly await the news.

Always yours,

J. M. B."

The letter from Bernard Shaw was virile and strong in its expression. It was written from Ayot St. Lawrence, Welwyn, Herts, on November 12th, 1911.

"SYLVIA,

If you have not had twenty messages from me, there is no such thing as telepathy. But I never could write them down. I can't now. When I think of it a sort of pang goes through me from the base of my heart down into my very entrails. I lose all sense of distinction between the Heathen Potentate and myself or anyone else in the world; I see no other woman on earth but you; we are Adam and Eve, and you are going to be torn to pieces and come to life again with a terrible contempt for fragile male things that would be broken by such creative miracles, and an enormous pride in having wielded all the powers of the Universe for a moment and come out triumphant. I really can't express poor Adam's feelings: it is a sort of trouble that gets at one's very vitals. You see, I am not a robust young gentleman like the H.P. I am a sentimental elderly person with a frightful sensitiveness to the Life Force, which, as it springs at you and forces you to make this tremendous effort for it, at the same time stirs up every tenderness for you to the point of positive heart-break. Nobody can possibly write it down: besides, it is ridiculous as literature, but as life, oh Lord, Sylvia, how it racks one's bones!

If it is a woman, it will cry with hunger, and be greedy, and prepare for its destiny without sentimental regrets

or protests. If it is a man, it will cry to reproach you for having forced it into the world, and try to get back. The H.P. will look at it from the corner of his eye, and think it an ugly little devil, and even feel an impulse to wring its wretched little neck for having given you such a time of it; but to please you he will pretend to be delighted with it and to feel like a father instead of like a selfish tormentor of his beloved. Pity the poor tiny animal and give it its chance. So few women can forgive their first child: it is the youngest—the Benjamins—that get spoiled. But you can see the thing in the large, and feel it in the deep, and be magnanimous.

I daren't go on. A man is so desperately frightened on these occasions, so contemptibly out of its temporary but all-absorbing emergencies, that his instinct is to shrink into a corner and say nothing. This is your day of battle, and everything that I can say may seem to you the triviallest twaddle. If I could go in with you, and we could rush through cheering and charging together, and sharing the wounds, and howling and writhing in company, then I should not fail you; but, as it is, what can I say or do? I must watch *The Times* for the announcement of the colossal relief, the victory, the triumph, and Sylvia a mother in Israel (There! I could not even write it properly). It's magnificent; but oh, Sylvia, Sylvia, Sylvia, how I wish it were over!!!!!!

G. B. S."

Vyner took a house for me in London, No. 8 Cadogan Gardens. How well I remember every corner of it. It really only had two lovely rooms, the drawing-room and my bedroom. These looked out over the gardens and were for ever sunlit. From my bed I could see the tops of the trees and amongst the branches three overfed and heavy pigeons cooed contentedly. It was in this room that Leonora was brought prematurely into the world three months before her time. My doctor was Sir Henry Simson, or "Simmie" as I would call him, that brilliant and perfect man whose skill and ability enabled me to bring three children safely into the world. Anyone kinder or more gentle could not have been found than "Simmie." I loved him, and everyone who came

in contact with him fell for the look in his soft eyes and the charm in his soft voice. He married Lena Ashwell, the finest actress of her day, and they were of such devotion to one another it was a pleasure to be with them.

My father-in-law was in Sarawak when Leonora was born; he was most displeased at my having produced a girl. I believe he had prepared all sorts of ceremonies in honour of his first grandson, and bell-ringers were waiting to peal forth as soon as they heard the joyful news. It was the thought of these bell-ringers, I feel sure, that prevented me ever giving birth to a son and heir. I thought of them months before my babies were born. I could not help imagining the Rajah, grim and unrelenting, sitting in his palace tapping the floor impatiently with his stick, and the bell-ringers, converted Chinese boys, hanging to the bell-ropes waiting for the signal that never came. It paralysed all the capacity in me to produce a male. If I had never known about those bell-ringers I might at this present moment have a long line of successors to the Raj. Leonora was not like other babies. She was not crumpled and red and unrecognizable even when she was born. She had the appearance of a small unfolding rose. I could not believe that anything so lovely belonged to me. Although she only weighed three pounds, she was perfectly formed, even to her toe-nails. Of course I was not allowed to touch her very often, she was wrapped from head to heel in cotton-wool, and from out of this bundle of whiteness her tiny face would emerge. She was born with jaundice—all my children were—but Simmie assured me that it was only a preliminary to a perfect skin. In this I think I can say without conceit, his prophecy came true.

J. M. Barrie wrote and congratulated me.

"How splendid (he said), and how happy you must be and, I have no doubt, insufferably conceited. However, for this you shall not be blamed. What I want to know is when can I see HER and give her some advice as to the procedure of her life. I am so overjoyed that it has all come to you and send my love to all three.

Always yours,

J. M. B."

I wrote and asked him if he would be godfather to my baby, and he replied that he would be proud to be her godfather. "I may even say," he added, "that I should have felt sad if you had not asked me."

I was showered with letters and with flowers. Vyner was in the seventh heaven of delight. He did not dare go near the bundle of cotton-wool, or touch it, but the idea that he possessed a baby of his own enthralled him. As soon as I recovered I was obliged to have my appendix removed. This prolonged my convalescence and by the time we returned to Stanton Harcourt I felt tired and by no means well. I had obtained a nurse with excellent credentials but who looked taciturn and grim, and with the usual helplessness of so-called Society mothers, I knew nothing whatever about the feeding and upbringing of children, therefore I was entirely dependent on my nurse. I adored babies. I would have liked to have had the complete care of Leonora and I envied the mothers I saw out walking, wheeling their own perambulators. I found that I was always in the nursery and never with Vyner. Often in the middle of a meal I would spring to my feet and say: "I think I hear the baby crying," and I would rush upstairs and remain there. I could feel that I was being tactless and careless in the way I divided my attention between my husband and this delicate child, and anyone but Vyner would have been infuriated by my nervous concentration on the nursery. There is no more intricate and complicated state of life than matrimony. It is an art as well as a profession, and if you want to make a success of it my advice is, let your husband come first in everything. Treat him well and you will be rewarded. I am, I believe, a squaw woman at heart. I believe in serving and not being served. But then, everyone has not been so lucky in their husband as I have in mine.

When Leonora was eight months old Vyner said: "Now I must go back to my work," and I was in an agony because I knew that I should have to leave my baby. This was what my father had always feared for me, and why he had been so reluctant to consent to my marriage. He, with his amazing foresight, had imagined this moment and how I would feel when it confronted me. That was the penalty of marriage with the East. You were obliged to follow your husband

or your child. Leonora was then too young to be aware of separation, but as the years went on, which would I choose, Vyner or her? I closed my eyes to the future and deadened my soul to what might have to be. Saying to myself that I could do no good in England, I turned gaily to the novelty of travel. At last I would see Sarawak, the country that was my husband's home.

PART IV

MIDDLE AGE

OLIVER had returned from America disconsolate and upset. His love affair had apparently become entangled and could not be straightened out. I knew very little of what was wrong, all I knew was that Oliver seemed miserable enough, until Vyner stepped in, and then the grey clouds lifted from round and about his head. That was the way of Vyner. No one ever knew what he was going to do next, but it was always something absorbingly exciting and unusual. This time it was something that took all our breath away. He invited Oliver to come out East with us. This news fell like a bombshell in our midst. And the astonishing thing was that Oliver accepted the invitation with alacrity. We were not a travelling family, the effort of getting ourselves to Scotland was almost more than we could bear. We were the kind of family that rooted ourselves into places and remained there. We grew very quickly into whatever soil we happened to be planted. But we did not spread. Vyner on the other hand was a wayfaring man, an explorer of all things. He was incapable of remaining anywhere for long, except Sarawak. But that was his work—there were a thousand interests to hold a man in place. He had never met a type quite like Oliver and the experiment absorbed him. "He is a rum chap," he would say over and over again to me. And I suppose it must have seemed strange to him, who had lived out of doors and in wild places, to see Oliver, old-coated and bedroom slippers, bending over a book, sunk in an arm-chair, and ignoring the fact that God's air was good, with elaborate unconcern. Oliver seldom went out in those days. He was secretly glad in his heart when it rained and he could have what he called

a good "froust." "In for the day" was a slogan he could appreciate, so it is not to be wondered at that we were amazed when he told Vyner that of course he would come with us. No wonder it seemed incredible to us that he of all people should agree to venture into the Archipelago, and to set his face towards the East.

And so the three of us set forth. Vyner and Oliver and I, Quaint companions it had to be admitted. Vyner wanted me to like it, but he need not have been afraid. The East was not like Italy. It seemed to hold in it everything my soul desired. The rising of the sun—I had never seen the birth of a day before, except perhaps in Covent Garden Market returning from some fancy-costume ball, amidst the smell of stale vegetables and fruit, and patches of dirty-looking sky opening on the turmoil of progression and closing on the clamour of some midnight carnival of fun. I had not stood with the darkness like a faintly scented cloak about my shoulders, watching a grey veil lift like a curtain from the faint horizon. Then, the blood-red sail of a fishing-boat emerging from out of the greyness into the open sea, and the stars disappearing and fading, and the sun making the moon look pale and unattractive. I could never quite explain even to myself the revelation of my first visit to the East. All I can say is that my imagination seemed to have at last found anchorage. I knew then all that my childish torment of dreams had meant to me. My wigwam. My intense yearning to be somewhere . . . anywhere except where I actually was. It must have been the passionate desire to be re-set. I seemed to have been like a Gauguin drawing in a Louis XIV frame. For I do believe that to be happy each living soul must find its right environment. And mine was the East. Until then I had been the wrong kind of thing in the wrong kind of place. A fish out of water dying upon barren soil. Dressed up civilization had meant nothing to me. It was the primitive life and ingenuous people that I needed. The artless simplicity of variegated tribes enthralled me. Their extraordinary retentive manner made my impulsiveness seem like a boisterous tempest against a tranquil sea. They seemed to me to possess a sunshine of the mind, that we in England could not reach. Their thoughts were as enclosed ■ an Eastern temple and their eyes were like dark



THE "GULA GULA" MAN AT PORT SAID

Photograph taken by the Rejeh.



A KYAN LADY
Photograph taken by the Rajah.

windows with soft curtains that concealed them from our gaze. Half of their charm was their elusiveness, and they would very seldom answer a direct question that was made to them. They would either say that they were "not quite sure," or they would bend their heads and smile and draw in their breath with a little hissing sound that was both attractive and obscure. To really know a Mahommedan you should become one, and even then you will only know as much as they consider fitting that you should.

There was nothing eventful on our trip. We played the usual ship games such as deck tennis and quoits, and of course there were sports and prizes and a concert and a fancy-dress dance. I think I can truthfully say that for twenty years I have given away the prizes in every P. and O. that I have travelled in, and I can also truthfully say that I have adored every skipper on that line. People may abuse the P. and O., they can cry down its system and its food; we have tried all lines, but the good old P. and O. has been always the one we have returned to. Of course we are biased now that our son-in-law's interests have become our own, but in those days we had no reason to prefer one more than the other. To board a P. and O. gives one the pleasurable sensation of opening the door of one's own home. The stewards are so thoughtful and so charming, and everything is done to make that monotonous journey happier and less dull.

Oliver was immensely popular on board in spite of the fact that he did not enter into many of the sports. Games were not very much in his line. He would sit surrounded by maps and guide-books, and keep a minute diary of everything that was going on. I suppose to Vyner we must have seemed absurd with our shrill ecstatic cries of delight and our rapture over things that he had long ago ceased to notice. Our joy, for instance, at being in Port Said, that dustbin of the Eastern route that sweeps all nationalities into its sordid and its crowded streets. "Wait until you see Colombo and Penang," Vyner kept telling us. But we, in our ignorance, thought there could be no places more Eastern than Port Said. We never in our wildest dreams imagined such beauty as Ceylon. The Gall Face Hotel, with its palm trees bending into the sea that

foamed on to the sand below. The aromatic perfume that filled the air to the utmost limit of the horizon. To raise my head as I stood on deck and scent Colombo ahead of me. Those are the memories that counted and the warmth that is filling my old age. My delight in all these things must have seemed to Vyner affected and absurd. He was so accustomed to it all, and yet even in Colombo I noticed he began to expand and enjoy a little of our ecstasy. His foot was on his native heath, so to speak, and he felt that he was home again. There is no warmer welcome in every sense of the word than the welcome of the East.

Oliver and I went bathing in Colombo at a lovely place called Mount Lavinia. But, like so many places in the East, there was a snare beneath the surface of the sun. Whilst Vyner was sitting with his back turned to the sea talking to the native boys upon the beach I was nearly drowning within only a few yards from the shore. There were strong tides and undercurrents in that seemingly placid sea, and I believe had it not been for Oliver I would not be sitting writing of it now. I swam and swam and could not make any headway. My legs were dragged backwards, and all the time the waves from round and about the rocks were washing over me. Oliver came at once to my assistance, and I flatter myself I did not clutch round his neck and scream. All I wanted was support, and he gave it to me, and even then the native boys who knew this part of the sea, noticed that I was exhausted and ran in with a long pole to rescue me. Passengers from P. and O.'s have suffered as I did, and one or two have actually been drowned, yet no warning notice has been placed there, and nearly everyone who first goes to Colombo chooses that one spot to bathe in.

I went shopping in Singapore, and I became more rational amongst ribbons and lace lingerie. I was thrilled by the masses of Chinese coolies labouring through the day and running with gaily coloured rickshaws, their naked feet slapping against the hardness of the road.

We went to stay at Government House. Sir Arthur Young was at that time Governor of Singapore, Sir John Anderson having but just retired. Sir Arthur and Lady Young were charming to us, and I remember how terrified I was when he

insisted that I should join in their game of Russian Pool, a game I was in reality very fond of and could play creditably well.

Then we started to Sarawak. We travelled in the Sarawak and Steamship Company's steamer called the *Kuching*. Captain Barton did everything in his power to make us comfortable, but I was far too excited even to rest. We stopped at Goebilt without however dropping anchor, and Mr. North, the manager of the British Malayan Company, and Mr. H.R.A. Day came on board to pay their respects. When we passed the Sijinkat Quarry great preparations had been made to welcome us. The village quarry and Sijinkat hill had all been wonderfully decorated with flags and lanterns and flowers and evergreens. The fleet of the P.W.D. lighters were all "dressed," whilst banners were held aloft bearing such greetings as "Salamat Ka-datang-an Sri Paduka Duli yang maha mulia Tuan Rajah Muda serta istri nya Tuan Ranee Muda," that meant "Welcome," though to me it meant absolutely nothing at all. Nevertheless it gave me a thrill just the same to see my name written on a flag.

When our steamer was sighted it was about midday, if I remember rightly, and there came the lovely sound of the beating of many gongs, and all along the river bank was lined with people. Crackers were fired, and we were obliged to stand by the rails in the boiling sun and wave and wave until they were out of sight. Thus we continued on our way. It had become uncomfortably warm by then, and the smell of the cargo on board, a mixture of sago and dried fish, was extremely trying. But I shall never forget as long as I live the glorious turns in that river as we slowly steamed our way up. The broad and winding beauty of it, the little villages clamped on to the mud banks, as if the palm leaf houses had all been tumbled from a basket and left exactly as they fell. There were brown-skinned women standing waist-deep in the water with their long bamboo jars upon their shoulders. Children, like little shy fawns, were leaping through the mud. Boats of all sizes lay at anchor and beflagged. Fishing-nets hung from long poles to dry, and looked like gigantic spiders' webs against the sky. We wound our way round corner after corner through these low, uncultivated banks, behind which were occasional tangles of old jungle. In the distance there were squares of

green padi fields looking like brightly coloured patches in old tapestry, and far away the mountains of the interior rolled into view with transparent clouds drifting by the sides of them.

As we neared Kuching and came round the bend by the Fort the battery commenced to fire a salute. By that time a number of Europeans, Malay officials and Chinese Towkeys had assembled at the Astana landing-place. Cracker firing became general, and hundreds of people looking like variegated flowers were gathered along the front of the bazaar. A company of young men dressed in neat uniforms of white, with coloured sashes, putties and red fez, and each one carrying a Sarawak flag, were drawn up on the river wall facing the Astana, and they sang a welcome to us in Malay. An enormous banner bearing the inscription "Welcome to their Highnesses the Rajah Muda and Ranee Muda" also formed a prominent feature of this amazing demonstration.

Then Mr. Caldicot, the Resident of Sarawak proper, Mr. Baring-Gould, Resident of the 3rd Division, and the Treasurer, Mr. Dallas, came on board to meet us. What I was wearing and what I said to them I have no idea. How can anyone describe exactly how they would feel if they stood for the first time on the edge of all they had dreamed. All I do remember is that my emotion was not becoming to me. My face was scarlet and moist, and I was consumed with an awkward shyness and so were they. It was in almost complete silence that we made our way to the Astana.

At the top of the steps there were a few ladies waiting to be presented to me by Mrs. Caldicot. A guard of honour under the command of Captain Cunynghame was drawn up on the lawn in front of the Astana, and as we passed they presented arms and the Rangers' band played the Sarawak National Anthem.

And thus amidst a hundred critical eyes Vyner entered the Astana for the first time with me, hanging like an anxious limpet, on his arm.

The Astana was like a fantastic dream palace that H. G.

Wells might have conceived in one of his visionary books. It was unbelievable in its medley of disappointing beauty. The shell of it was lovely, it was like a lovely cloak upon the shoulders of an ugly woman. The white walls with the grey tower growing from them, the huge high rooms that stretched themselves the whole length of the building, everything lent itself towards the making of a perfect home. But it was what was in the rooms that made this Royal residence such a travesty. The Rajah, instead of having Eastern furniture, had filled his palace with appalling imitations of every period in English and French history. Cheap gilt stood side by side with poor mahogany. Early Victorian sofas stood stiffly by the walls. Crude Dresden figures held caskets in their broken china fingers, and mercetricious mirrors were dotted upon thin legged tables of no particular period at all. It was so hideous, the inside of this house that should have been so beautiful. From the veranda on one side there was the most perfect view anyone could possible gaze upon. A stretch of green lawn edged by scaling-wax palms, whose scarlet stems were outlined against the sky, and then a broad brown river, with the small town stretched untidily along the opposite bank. On the other side the garden sloped into the distance, with beds of crimson cannas and roses and purple bougainvillæa spread upon the trees. Travellers palms stood against the sky like open fans, and the smell of some glorious blossom hung in the air like a drug. There is a certain bird in Sarawak that makes my heart stand still even now as I am writing of it. A bird with notes that are softer than a flute—full-throated notes that turn you and churn you inside. People in England talk about the silence of the East. What nonsense that is. Sarawak has no silence. All day the Chinese hawkers cry their wares. Gongs are beaten in the mosque, and now and again the wailing of a one-stringed instrument lingers in the air. At night there is an eternal chorus of bull-frogs and of beetles, and now and again this clamorous chorus will swell into a million tiny sounds, until it would seem as if every leaf and every flower and every patch of grass possessed some living thing that was calling to its mate. So now you know why Sarawak has always filled me with delight, and why I have never been lonely there, and why when in England I am

longing to return. From the day I turned the last bend of the river and saw the Astana high up on the green grass slopes I have not wished for any lovelier home.

The celebrations in honour of our arrival lasted many days. A display of fireworks was given by the Tamil community, and our enjoyment was by no means lessened by the fact that a great many of the fireworks refused to ignite owing to the damp. We also went to an entertainment in the Kampong Gorsik and dined at the Residence of Inchi abu Bakar—Inchi Bakar had long been a leading figure amongst the Malay community and also the Chinese. It was a wonder party for Oliver and myself. Two typical Londoners amongst a Malay gathering. We had never seen anything so lovely as the little Kampong, brilliantly lit by a thousand Chinese lanterns and little flickering oil lamps. The dinner itself, served in European style, might have been dished by the best chefs at the Ritz. We might have been at the Ritz as we sat amongst those eighty courteous guests, until after dinner, when they began to hiccough loudly. This, I was told by Vyner, was the polite way of showing their appreciation of the food. So, unless their departure is heralded by an outbreak of the most noisy belching the host is made aware that his dinner has been a failure.

After dinner speeches were made to which Vyner replied in fluent Malay, and all the while Oliver and I sat paralysed with awkwardness, unable to understand a word.

We then assembled upon the open veranda, and there below us a theatrical performance was in progress. A temporary theatre had been erected outside the house round which an enormous crowd had gathered. Once again Oliver and I were forced to sit in bewildered and uncomfortable silence. There is no more awful feeling than being in a country the language of which you are unable to understand. You can laugh and ejaculate, and pretend as much as you like, but the effort of it is not worthy of the result ; the soft and somewhat injured look of a Malay to whom you have said you are bored to death when you meant to express gratitude and thanks.

We had not been in Sarawak long when I was asked to perform the ceremony of opening the new dry dock. I shall never forget that ceremony as long as I live. It had been

announced in pamphlets and in the *Sarawak Gazette* as one of the most important events in the history of the Sarawak Public Works. This did not tend to encouragement, or help me to feel at my ease. Vyner was nervous. He has always been stricken by any public ceremony, and his restless timidity infected me, so that before I was dressed I was already in a bath of perspiration. We all three sallied forth at 5 p.m. and proceeded in a boat up-stream until we arrived at the entrance to the dock. A bugle call from the boat heralded our arrival and the gate of the dock was flung open. We were then paddled to the steps inside the gate, up which we ascended to the dais prepared for our reception. After having been presented with an enormous bouquet of wild orchids which was smothered in ants, I was then invited to declare the new dock open. I can remember so well stepping forward and saying in a voice that sounded like a hinge that wanted oiling: "I declare this dock now open, and name it the Vyner Brooke."

The hubbub that ensued was incredible. Vyner had prepared a magnificent speech which he endeavoured to deliver. But, in the meantime, the Chinese and Malays had gone crazy with excitement and activity. They plunged into the water with ropes between their teeth, they swarmed upon the platform laughing and screaming to one another instructions and wishes of good will. Vyner's speech was spoken but unheard. We did not dare look at one another, we were on the borders of hysterics. When we at last arrived home at the Astana we laughed as if we could never be serious again. We can still laugh when we think back on the opening of the Vyner Brooke Dock.

Then the Rajah arrived back from some trip he had been taking and our days of fun were at an end. We all seemed to turn into stone as he entered the Astana, and all I received was an icy peck on the cheek and Oliver an icy stare. Nobody seemed natural, the Government officers seemed to have shrivelled and no longer filled their clothes. There were no smiles upon the Malay boys' faces. It was as if a curtain had been drawn on all the comedy and that the drama was about to commence.

What was it about Charles Anthony Johnson Brooke that created so much change? Even I had to reluctantly admit that he had a dignity so profound, an immensity of power so

amazing that it was not surprising the Malays and Dyaks looked upon him even in his advancing years as the very main-spring of the country. He seemed to be a tradition to these people as mysterious as a page of the Koran. This intangible old man who sat upon an iron bench, with his deafness and his single eye, filled the Malays with wonder and with awe. They knew in their simple hearts that he had dedicated his life to them, and whatever one may say of Charles Brooke, one cannot deny that he "kept faith" with his people. They knew that during his reign he had not attempted to promote commercial or industrial development. All he had done was to encourage agriculture throughout the land. Agriculture and education were the two gods he believed in. He thought thereby to give these leisured people a pastime, and yet through it all he never once forgot what was the great Brooke policy: "Sarawak belongs to the Malays, the Sea Dyaks, the Land Dyaks and the Kyans and other tribes. Not to Us. It is for THEM we labour, not OURSELVES."

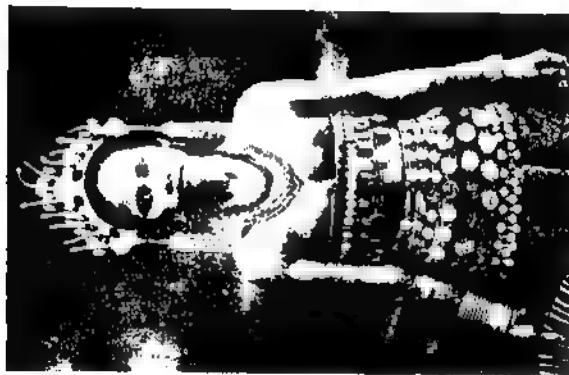
It is impossible to deny that Charles Brooke turned the little straggling capital into an almost model town. He was not a clever man, and he had no charm, but he was an honest, upright English gentleman—the kind that England's reputation used to rest on and has made the Empire what it is to-day.

When I first went out to Sarawak there were hardly any roads, and hardly any what you might call solid buildings. But the people had had the hands of education laid upon them, and like little children they had gradually begun to ape our ways. They had begun to wear trousers instead of their own picturesque and perfect dress. They wore white suits, and they had discarded their velvet hats for our European felt ones. They had learned to carry brass-tipped canes, and to wear brown boots upon their naked feet. The missionaries had begun to bring to them the Christian Faith.

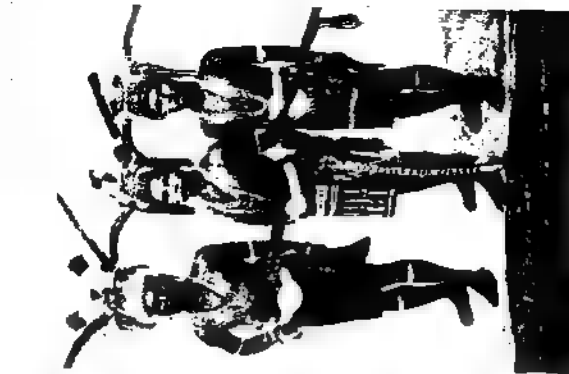
What is the actual definition of a Christian I often wonder. The dictionary tells us that it is one who, being baptized, holds the faith of Christ; one who professes the religion and doctrines taught by Christ in His Church, and who adheres to the code of conduct enjoyed by them. A decent person, humane, charitable and kind. And a pagan is one who is a heathen, a worshipper of false gods. One who is neither



A DYAK WARRIOR



A DYAK LADY



DYAK WARRIORS



A MALAY GIRL.

From a Pastel by the Author.

Christian, Jew nor Moslem. A person who, from any point of view, is unenlightened, having the character and beliefs of ■ barbarian.

Which of these two things was I? I could not help remembering London and its life, the gay kaleidoscope of colour and the riot of laughter and of noise. I remembered the things I had seen and heard and the sort of life that most of us had lived. Yet all of us were Christians. We had been confirmed, and according to the dictates of religion we had been made members of the Kingdom of Heaven. How did I compare with a Dyak girl, the little so-called pagan who believed in omens and in dreams, the girl who was as simple and honest as a child, whose moral code was high, and whose gods were of the sea. I tell you I would not like to be in judgment on the Judgment day, facing a family of Dyaks who had led the simplest and the cleanest of lives, and telling them that because of their simplicity they might not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Can this be what God really meant, or have we wandered from the way of things. When Christianity first began the people had religion in their hearts. They were so close to nature they could not be anything but natural. Is it civilization that has drawn us apart from God, and has the magic of religion been harnessed as it were and brought to earth?

Charles Brooke had lifted this little town into a perfect state. And as it lay before my astonished eyes with its gaily coloured bazaar and pure white offices, and its great road winding through the swamps; and as I saw the minutest lawns with their fountains and trees, the recreation club, the tennis court, the golf course, race course, churches, mission schools and museum, I could do nothing but admire the strange lean man who, with his unfriendly face and uncongenial manner, had brought about these things. His capital was all but complete. But three of his achievements were yet to come—the Water Works, the Railway and the Wireless.

We had not been more than one month in Sarawak when

a storm began to gather between Vyner and his father. I think the cause of it was probably the old, old story of a parent's resentment against the relinquishing of power to his son. It was not difficult to see that the Rajah was jealous of this heir of his and the fact that he was to inherit irritated him. He looked this way and that to see how far he could clip his wings, when an inspiration came to him to tie him even further, and to take away from him the full strength of control. Without even informing Vyner of what was in his mind he issued a Proclamation decreeing that his second son, Bertram Brooke, heir presumptive to the Rajah of Sarawak in the event of his eldest son, Charles Vyner Brooke, Rajah Muda of Sarawak, failing to have male issue, should be received on his arrival in the State of Sarawak with a Royal salute and honours equivalent to his rank. He further decreed that he should be recognized in future by all the inhabitants of Sarawak as being a part of the Government State, and that such recognition should be duly registered in the records of the Supreme Council of the Raj of Sarawak.

I do not think Vyner would have resented this so deeply had the Rajah told him beforehand. But he knew nothing. He did not even know that Adeh and Gladys were on their way to Sarawak, it had all been arranged in secrecy from him. The Proclamation landed like a bombshell in our midst, we read into every line treachery and deceit. Emotions run high in Eastern countries, and we could not see anything in this document but a direct indication of distrust in Vyner. It was a definite assumption that I was incapable of bringing forth an heir, and that because my first child had been a girl I was barren as far as boys were concerned. Vyner was furious, I was miserable and Oliver was diplomatically concerned for us both. Vyner's first letter to his father, sent from the Astana to the offices, was careful and controlled, but it stated firmly his disapproval of the Proclamation. The Rajah immediately replied that he was "surprised" at Vyner's letter, and that there was only one word to explain it—"Jealousy." He said that what he had proposed was only for Vyner's good and that of Sarawak. I do not remember ever having seen Vyner ■ infuriated before, and yet with it all he kept his sense of humour. The letters were rushed to and fro across the river,

from us to the offices and from the offices to us, and he used to watch through his field-glasses to see the stir round the Government offices when they arrived, like angry bees that had had some of their honey stolen from them.

Vyner's contention was that he considered it his duty to protect his own rights and those of his wife and children, and this new arrangement, secretly prepared behind his back and only announced to him at the last moment, utterly destroyed those rights. He could not approve of or consent to the Proclamation, he said, and he told the Rajah that if he chose to persist in issuing it he would be reluctantly obliged to make public his protest and leave the country until things had been more satisfactorily arranged. "The position you propose to put me in," he wrote in one letter to his father, "must inevitably degrade me in the eyes of the population and amounts to admittance that you do not consider me fit to govern this country without the sanction and approval of my younger brother. That is a position which I decline to hold." In the meantime I was half in and half out of my boxes, not knowing whether to pack or unpack them. Our meals, ■ you can imagine, were far from pleasant ones. The Rajah would sit tapping his fingers on the table, his one eye boring into us like a gimlet. We three would keep up an animated conversation with bland smiles upon our faces, just as if nothing had happened, but as soon as the Rajah went to his office the war began again.

"DEAR FATHER (wrote Vyner at last), I shall be much obliged if you will send me an answer to my last letter as my wife is anxious to know whether it will be necessary for her to begin packing her boxes.

Yours,

VYNER."

I had seen nothing of Sarawak or its people beyond ■ few formal receptions at the Astana and the Resident's house. This alarming correspondence between father and son shook Sarawak to its foundations. Such a thing had never occurred before in the annals of its history. It must not be thought for one moment that Adeh was in any way connected with this

scheme or that his journey to Sarawak was a secret one. Adeh thought Vyner had been informed of everything and that it was in full agreement on all sides that he and Gladys had been sent for. Adeh was, and has always been, and is still the most perfect and wonderful of brothers. All his life he has worked quietly and inconspicuously behind Vyner, demanding nothing and seeking no self-praise. He has loved Sarawak, and he has lived in it and been always the strongest supporter of the Raj. I know no simpler or kinder man than he is, and I also know no better speaker. The documents he can write are beautifully worded, not the hurried and half-humorous epistles that Vyner will send often to his Government. Adeh has always taken whatever he has done with earnest seriousness. Vyner never can resist a laugh between the lines. The brother combine was a strong one. It could not be broken by difference of opinion. This sudden thrust in the dark seemed so inconceivable in Adeh, and it was not surprising that we lost faith for a moment in our greatest ally and our most loyal friend. Adeh knew nothing of the storm that awaited him. The Rajah, infuriated by what he called "Vyner's disobedience," threatened to take the matter up officially. Vyner still insisted that unless the Document and the Proclamation were withdrawn he would leave Sarawak at once. He was then told that his presence was no longer necessary in the Government offices or in the Supreme Council, and then, quite suddenly, the Rajah gave way a little and sent a covering letter, rather pathetic and for him almost beautifully expressed. He said in it that he had intended this visit to the East to be his last, and that he had almost decided to resign and let Vyner hold the "Raj." He was going on a trip round the coast, he added, to bid good-bye to all friends, old and new. He only wished Vyner success in the future. He recommended him to travel whilst Adeh's reception and the Proclamation were held. "I have no ambition for myself personally," he said. "My only consideration is for the safety of the future. I came into power after the late Rajah's death under very different circumstances forty-four years ago."

I was nearly reduced to tears by this epistle, but Vyner knew his father. He knew this pathetic old man line of his, drawn out each time there was a quarrel. He knew how it always

seemed in the end as if the Rajah were the ill-used party and no one else. So the final answer he sent his father was a little abrupt. He had himself to consider, he said, and he had me, and the possible chance of having a son and heir. He regretted, he wrote to the Rajah, that his conduct should have been viewed as "disobedience," and assured him that it had been with deep regret that he had felt it his duty to oppose his policy on this occasion. But he could not give his consent to a scheme which so compromised his future. He would remain in England until things were on a more satisfactory footing.

We packed our boxes and we all three steamed away from that beautiful river to the sea. It was the only possible thing to be done. Over and over again Vyner had had instances of the Rajah's lack of faith in him. Little hints had been dropped as to his integrity. Was he not of too frivolous a disposition to rule a country of that size? Would he take his position seriously enough? Nobody was quite sure of this man with the kind blue eyes and merry laugh. What lay behind that careless good-humour of his, and was his warm-hearted cordiality a menace or a threat?

Both Vyner and I left letters for Adeh to receive on his arrival. Vyner explained that he had left Sarawak owing to reasons that made it impossible to remain. He was uncertain as to what part his brother had played in the formation of this State Committee in London over which he had been made the President. "I am to do the dirty work out here," he said, "whilst you and your gang are to say what I am to do and not to do. No thank you." And then he added at the end of it all, "I do not return to Sarawak again unless with full power. By full power I mean absolute control over the country."

My letter, if I remember rightly, was far more insulting and unpleasant. Poor Adeh. I often try to imagine his bewildered expression as he perused these infuriated and inflammable epistles from his brother and myself. I can almost see him passing his hand over his head, and a funny hurt look in his eyes. Anyone more innocent of envy could not have been found. Never at any time had he wished to be in Vyner's place, and never at any time had he assumed ■ position otherwise than that of faithful friendship. I often wished I had never mixed myself up in the affair. But I have

always been unfortunately made that way. I must interfere, I cannot keep my fingers out of the fire, no matter whose fire it is. I am nearly always to be found there disturbing it and adding on the fuel.

But, out of this evil there came good. Adeh and I were drawn closer to one another, and we grew to know and understand one another, and whatever doubts we may have had, were quieted and put away for ever. On landing in Sarawak, Adeh found us gone, and a storm raging the like of which had never been raised against the Rajah before. He found himself proclaimed and heralded as Heir Presumptive. There was no use in his denying it. He was at that time the only heir, and thanks to the Rajah's bell-ringers, and prophetic assurance that I would have no son, he has remained the lawful heir until this day. "Surely I shall have a boy in time," I kept saying confidently to Vyner, but all the time my heart was sinking within me. It would not be fair or right that I should have everything in life. God balances happiness with sorrow. I had so much. This was to be the flaw in the perfection of my marriage; a succession of girls and never, never a son.

Before my second baby was born we tried to keep it a secret from the Rajah. But the Press with probing observation gave out to the world that once more Sarawak was "expecting"—the Rajah summoned his bell-ringers, and told his Government to be prepared for festivities of joy upon the arrival of a son and heir.

Again my baby was brought prematurely into the world. And again it was a girl. Down went the flags, and crestfallen the Rajah's bell-ringers returned to their respective homes. He wrote stiffly and congratulated me. There was still a strain between us, and this mass production of girls did not help to lessen it. I felt sorry in a way for this fine old man whose reign was coming to an end. I knew that all he really cared for was the future of Sarawak, and that the only reason he had suggested the formation of a Council in London was to protect Sarawak against possible intrigues. Covetous eyes were being turned upon the rubber plantations and the oil-fields, and the wonderful little State, the people of which had been redeemed from the blackest horrors of barbarism

by the life work of James Brooke and of himself. The two white Rajahs, each in turn, had lived and worked for the good of these simple people. Unaided, they had extended their rule and brought peace and law and good government and prosperity to the land. This present Rajah no less than his great uncle before him had won the love and obedience of Malays and Dyaks alike. His sons were following in his footsteps and were prepared to carry on the grand tradition of the Brookes. But, would it not be wiser to safeguard their interests? The Rajah was eighty-three, and he saw a cloud no bigger than a man's hand gathering menacingly above their heads. It was understandable that he should seek a way to protect Sarawak and his sons. And so he formed his Supreme Council and the only mistake he made was in not confiding all this to Vyner.

The Council consisted of four Englishmen and five Malays; Mr. Caldicot, Mr. Dallas, Mr. Douglas and Mr. Baring-Gould being on the English side and the Datu Bandar, the Datu Temonggong, the Datu Emaum, the Datu Hakim and the Tua Kampong Gresik on the Malay. The Rajah, in his address, said that he had the pleasure of introducing to the Council his second son, the Tuan Muda who had been received with a Royal salute and guard of honour. He had directed these honours to be paid to the Tuan Muda not only because he was entitled to them personally, but also because he felt convinced that by his son being recognized in his position in Sarawak he would be able in future to be a much greater source of strength to the Raj and especially to him, and his successor. It could only be by suspicious minds that the idea could be entertained that the Tuan Muda's recognition was for any other purpose than that stated by him. His, the Tuan Muda's, action would be principally if not entirely devoted to the interests of the State in England and in Europe and not in the East except by the express wish of his successor, namely, His Highness the Rajah Muda.

He said that he could not prevent false reports, but it was not his intention to listen to them, or allow them in any way to divert him from his path of duty which was the safety of the Raj and people of his country after his own life was over. He added that he felt confident that all the true friends and

well wishers of the Raj and the country would be of his opinion and ready to support him if and when he needed. Very soon after this Council had been formed the Rajah left for England, and when he reached Cirencester I wrote to him and asked him to forgive and forget and to be friends again with Vyner. I assured him that we had not meant any harm. He replied at once:

"MY DEAR SYLVIA,

Since your letter of this morning received in bed, let all pass like a passing cloud in the tropics which is so shortly succeeded by a gleam of sunshine. Not a fig of feeling of vindictiveness ever has been or will be harboured by me towards you or anyone, I do assure you, and I sincerely hope that this clearing of the atmosphere may be extended towards Vyner's mother and Adeh. Bygones will be bygones. Sarawak has not been founded on antipathies. I shall be quite well in a few days and hope you and Vyner will shortly come to Chesterton.

Yours very aff.,

C. A. BROOKE."

We went to Cirencester and we stayed in that appallingly sporting house. Foxes' heads, brushes, whips, spurs and hunting horns were everywhere. The whole place seemed to me to smell of bran and oats. In the passage there was every sign of slaughter, and every manifestation of the cruelty of sport. It seemed unbelievable to me that the tropical birds the Rajah kept in a spacious out-door aviary were not used by him for targets of amusement. The Rajah loved his aviary. All the birds had heated inner cages where they slept. He loved his stables, and a walk round and a pat on the neck as each sleek head leaned out from the loose boxes was an everyday routine.

I learned a lot of things about my father-in-law on that visit. I discovered that even his own sister was so much in awe of him she dared not call him by his christian name. I saw that he was revered and respected by his fellow huntsmen. The Grand Old Man, they called him, and so he was in his way. But it was a hard way, and relentless and

apart. He was very fond of being thought a French scholar, and most of his diaries were written in that language. Masses of French literature filled his shelves. Whenever he was in a playful mood, he would break out into little French quotations, usually quoted with the point of them missed out. I could write pages of his eccentricities, but it must not be upon him that I must dwell. His reign was drawing to a close, and Vyner's turn was gradually approaching.

My life at that time was filled by my two babies. Leonora was of an alarming delicacy. She seemed to be always in a state of nervous tension, and there was a slight cast in her eyes that gave her a timid, trembling look. She was highly intelligent, and had she not been so nervous, she would, I feel sure, have been filled with laughter and fun. But always she seemed to be looking at some shadow that was with her, and she never ventured anywhere alone. She would have fits of screaming that nearly broke my heart. I felt so helpless listening to her. What was it that made her so afraid, and why were those early years so filled with weeping?

Vyner was terrified of her. He only touched her once, and then it was to toss her in the air, which she enjoyed. But alas, her laughter was not to be, it seemed, for, as he threw her upwards her little bald head crashed against the electric light globe that hung from the centre of the ceiling. I shall never forget the noise of that concussion, and the sight of glass falling about my baby's face. Of course Vyner imagined he had killed her. I have never seen a man look so distracted. But, oddly enough, Leonora was unhurt. Only a tiny scratch and a torrent of tears was the result.

I also had an accident with her. I shut her little finger in the door of my car. She was asleep at the time, and as I slammed the door, I had not noticed her hand was hanging close to it. The crunch of that little finger in the hinge gives me a feeling of sickness even now when I think back on it, and the awful knowledge that I myself had hurt the one thing I adored. Elizabeth was different. She was

absolutely square, like a soft pin-cushion, whichever way you put her she remained there. She had black hair that hung in thin long streaks ending in tight little curls. Her eyes were enormous and different in colour, one brown, the other grey. This grey eye gradually became flecked with brown and the sight in it has never been entirely clear. She had sweet ways with her and was more affectionate than Leonora, who seemed shy of any display of emotion. Whenever I laughed Leonora would thump my arm and scream, "Stop . . . stop," as if my laughter hurt her. It was extraordinary, this terror that pursued her. Sir Henry Simson said it was because she was premature. They often were excitable and highly strung, so he told me to console me, but nothing would alleviate my anxiety on her account. I made up my mind Leonora would not live, and it was this thought taking root in me that drove me to the fortune-teller's. I felt that I would rather know if she was going to die than have these agonizing doubts assailing me. I went to someone who I was told would reveal the future. A charming, sweet-faced woman who became a very real friend. The moment I sat down before her, she had not even touched my hand, she said to me: "I know why you have come. You are anxious about a child, are you not?" She did not know my name or where I came from, but she told me everything that was true about myself. "The child will not die," she said to me, "but she will be very delicate until she is about three years old. Then the tide will begin to turn and she will develop into a beautiful and healthy girl." I went home from that fortune-teller treading upon air. The strange part about it was I never once doubted that what I had been told was true. I never have doubted that it is given to some people to see ahead, even into a stranger's future, just as it has been given to me to read beyond men's words.

We had with us a housemaid whose name was Kate Corbet, and she had a certain gift of foretelling and the interpretation of dreams. We had found her at the Dreadnought Hotel, Callander, when we first went up there after we were married. It is strange how a chance knock upon the door, and an early cup of tea may bring someone into your life who will remain there. Kate at that time was an extremely good-looking

girl with rosy cheeks, and the moment Vyner caught sight of her standing smiling in the doorway with a tray in her hands he said: "We must have that girl with us." Now if ever Vyner wanted a thing it was usually his by the end of the week. And it was not much longer than this when Kate was well established in our house, and she has remained with us on and off for over twenty years. Not a bad record for a casual acquaintance made over an early cup of tea.

I sent J. M. Barrie a photograph of Leonora, so that he should see that he had a godchild of unusual beauty. He wrote and thanked me by return and said:

"MY DEAR SYLVIA,

Thank you so much for Leonora's photograph. It is a dear face and she already looks as if she knew most of the things that are worth knowing. What they are I have no idea and that gives her a grand air of mystery."

The little maisonette in Davis Street where Elizabeth had been born had proved for a while worthy of the name I had christened it. The Angel Flat was just like a toy house, even to its decoration. It was ideal excepting for one thing. We had not been there very long when it began to dawn upon us that it was astoundingly noisy, and that we could not hold any form of conversation when the windows were open. It was in the days when people whistled shrilly from their houses for cabs, and as there was a cab rank just outside, our street was a turmoil of grinding brakes and slamming doors. Then the nursery maid caught her foot in the lift, and the children and nurse and nursery maid were left suspended between two floors. This shattered my affection for the "Angel Flat," and we made up our minds we would not stay there very long.

So Vyner began to search round for another house, and day after day he went walking round London and outside the long tentacles of the City towards Wimbledon and Hampstead. It was upon Wimbledon Common he eventually discovered our new home, and the reason he took it was that the name on the gate was "Tilney House."

Dear little Tilney House, we had many a happy time

there. It was plain-faced and suburban, and it stood in a line with other houses exactly like it. Yet it had a charm that was all its own. The little handkerchief of a garden at the back was gazed upon by every window in Wimbledon, but nevertheless it was a garden. To be able to wheel the children across Wimbledon Common, with the strong air that was clean and smokeless, Leonora loved it. She had a little white carriage I pushed before me, whilst she sat regally inside, driving two prancing dappled ponies before her. I could see Elizabeth eyeing this push-cart with enormous eyes of envy and I knew the moment she was old enough to form words she would be driving the wooden ponies and Leonora back in the pram.

Then Vyner was obliged to return to Sarawak and I was left alone. It was my first introduction to the ways of Eastern marriages, my first realization of what the separations meant. This was what my father had feared for me, this dividing of family life, and the danger of a thing being broken and unable to mend again as it had been. I suppose there must always be a danger of this kind, but Vyner and I have never suffered from it. There has always been too great an understanding, and our marriage has been built on too great a faith in one another for time to drive his way with a sword between us. Every time Vyner has been out East without me it has meant that most of the laughter has gone out of my life at home. But I have had children to compensate me, whereas he has had to go alone. But as the years rolled on, we divided up the children, and he has been able to have one of them with him. After he left and I had become accustomed to my solitude, I endeavoured to re-link a little of my old life, and the slender chain of friendship I had made. I began by writing to Sir John French because it had always seemed to me that he would be the one who would remain. I told him I was home and suggested we might meet. It seemed so long, I said, since I had seen him and I did not want him to forget me altogether.

"MY DEAR SYLVIA (he replied), I have thought of you much and often and have wondered what had become of you. The fact is, every minute of my time and thoughts

have been taken up since my return from America. I was called back again three weeks sooner than I intended to come. From early morning till late at night the War Office has held me tight. Indeed I should love to come and have a good talk. Do give me a chance. How could I possibly ever forget you? You know much better.

Always the same,
J. F."

Two days later he wrote again saying that it was so difficult to arrange an evening.

"Shall we have lunch together one day before Xmas (he said), and talk over an evening? I often think of you and am so truly delighted to know you are happy, my dear. So few are in this damnable world.

Yours ever,
J. F."

We did have lunch together at the Carlton, and we discussed everything from the time a man or a woman is born to the time they die. I found that he had a strange superstitious nature and that he was not altogether a happy man in his work or in his home. He demanded a lot out of life, with his longing for love and the blue insistence of his eyes, his eyes that looked straight at everything and everyone. He was no diplomat. He simply could not understand the foil of words, and how you can win a losing fight by a gesture and a look. He drove at things too much, impulsive and violent but forever great. Whatever anyone may say, Sir John French was a great little General, and his failure in the end, if fail he did, was only on account of the candid quality of his mind. He believed in people. I did not. He trusted people. I did not. There was no bitterness to begin with, no dejection, no thought that one day he might fail. A simple cavalry officer was all he was, until fate placed him high upon a pinnacle from which most men if they live long enough, return to earth.

Doll had taken up art in a big way. She had left her home and was in a flat at Hampstead, and there she was leading a

Bohemian and somewhat vague life amongst a group of modern painters who were beautiful and exotic and unusual. I remember I went to tea with her once, and her small, full-coloured room was crowded. Mark Gertler was there, pale and ■ lovely as a girl. It was impossible not to admire him in spite of his somewhat artificial pose. He seemed to me to represent all that modern art really meant. He was passionate, and colourful, and had all the beauty of the Jewish race. His paintings were exquisite in texture and design. He promised to be a genius if only his nature would allow it. But that group were of such a turbulent twisted kind, they would not be honest to themselves.

There were two girls in that room, Carrington and Humphries. One blonde, with straight thick hair cut like a boy's, and the other dark and pale, with large soft eyes. These were Doll's special friends—these two girls and Mark Gertler, and I know I felt out of it and foolish as I listened to them talking. Chaos reigned over tea because the butter was nowhere to be found. It was eventually traced as far as the bath. Doll kept all her scraps of food in the bath, it was a kind of local larder; she would come to me when she wanted what she would call her "weekly wash."

It was during this time that I went to a Review or birthday parade or some such ceremony at Windsor with my father, and there he introduced me to Lord Kitchener. He had an extraordinarily square face, and I remember thinking that the painting I had done of him from a photograph was not nearly wide enough. His eyes were beautiful, they were so intensely blue, but it was as if one was looking at two wonderful patches of sky through a mist. He was not attractive, at least I did not find him so, and there was round about him this armour of reserve. I do not think he spoke to me at all, indeed there was no real reason why he should. He seemed absorbed in my father and attentive to everything he said. I could not help wondering why Lord Kitchener held England so enthralled. What inspiration had made him create out of himself a mystery man? The papers said of him that he was invincible, an iron Goliath of restraint. They said he was proof against all enemies who strove to overthrow him on account of his being ■ man of so few

words. Even my father became puzzled by him. What was he really? Was he a genius or was he but a myth? He did not live long enough for anyone to say. Many knew, but they would not tell, and so Kitchener has remained a hero in the history of his day.

A little later I met Douglas Haig. Now here was a very different type of man. Maybe, owing to my devotion to Lord French, I could not or would not see that he was a great man. As a rule I could sense greatness, but this extremely good-looking soft-faced man exuded nothing to me but a gentle charm, a sadness almost, and he had the expression of a dreamer rather than a soldier. I could not help thinking as I looked at him what an awfully dull little boy he must have been. There was no suggestion of humour anywhere about him. I kept comparing him with Sir John French's flashes of ridicule and banter, and the twinkle that was ever in his eyes. But then, comparisons are cruel, and one should judge people on whatever merits they may have, not upon the attributes of others.

Sir John French wrote to me soon after I had settled into our new home, and told me he was going to try to motor down to Wimbledon to see me.

"Like you (he said), I shall always love you dearly. I always have in spite of your cruel criticisms. . . .

Always dear, dear Sylvia, as ever,

J. F. (The King of Moods)."

Then I heard from Bernard Shaw again. Such a characteristic letter written with his customary brilliance and the magnetic way he had of bringing his own personality into the very lines that ran neatly on the pale green paper.

"BOULOGNE SUR MER.

16th October, 1913.

SYLVIA,

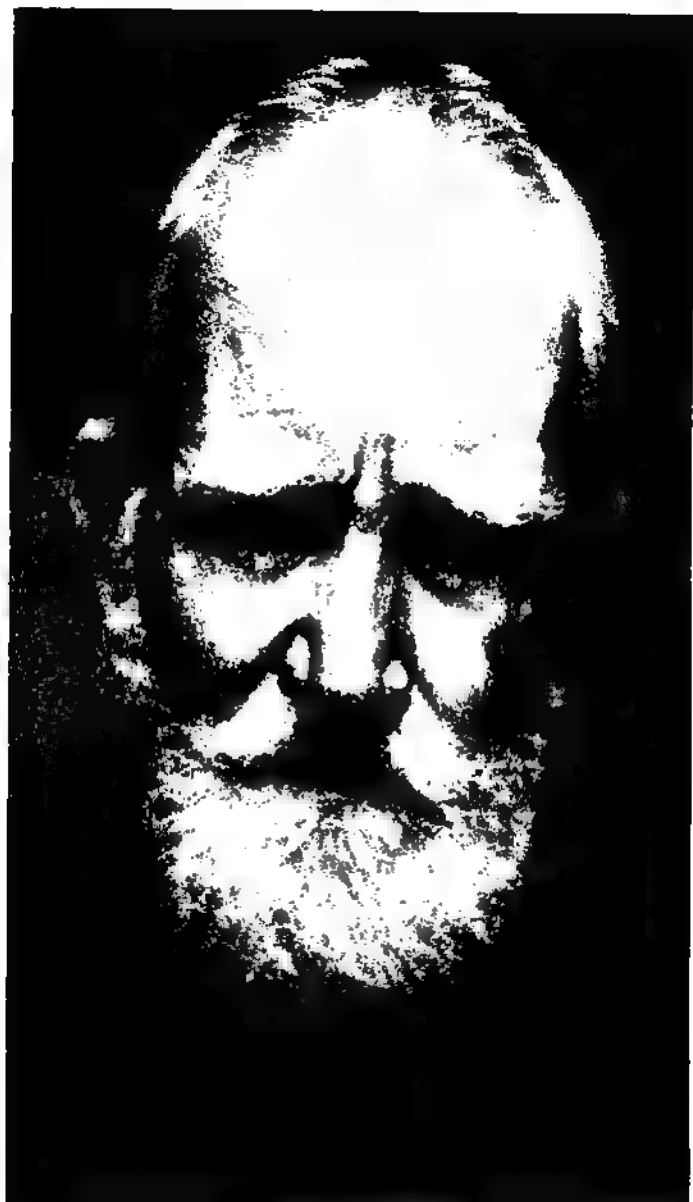
Do not tell me reproachfully that your letter is dated the 18th Sept., and that the day after to-morrow will be the 18th October. I know it; and I reproach

myself more than I deserve. I have been travelling meaninglessly thousands of miles, breaking my car and getting it mended; setting it on fire and putting it out; scorching and unpacking and packing and paying and tipping with frightful vicissitudes of energy and high spirits and emptiness and despair. I rested only at southern places where I could feel nothing and write nothing. When I came to life in the north I could only go to bed tired, or to a cinema, or drift about strange streets and rivers in the moonlight. This is my last night abroad; and I consecrate it to you.

Touching that perversely female infant, I quite realized that its sex was an oriental tragedy. When the necessary boy does come, he will be so bullied by elder sisters that he will probably inaugurate his reign by cutting off every female head in Sarawak. And there is a still more awful possibility. My mother began with two girls and finished with me. To make a man of genius you require practice. You practise on girls—say two girls; and then having formed the habit of making girls, when you try a boy you start him as a girl before you recollect what you are about, and only get in his sex at the last moment, with the result that he is a monster who writes plays because he can be a hero (I can't write) or a heroine on paper just as he chooses. Having begun with an Infinitesimal you will end with an Immortal; and that will be a very stormy look-out indeed for you and Sarawak. The sooner Vyner hands that unhappy island over to the British Government for thirty millions or so, the better. Then you can hand the Immortal over to his doting grandmother to be spoiled (she will do anything for you if you will let her play with him) and live happily ever after.

But women make the best sovereigns. The Salic law is a mistake; it should be the other way about. Constitutional monarchy is not a man's job: it is a woman's. The relation of a king to his ministers is intolerable: the relation of a queen to them works much better. Or else a king ought to have a female cabinet.

Are you up yet? You ought to be; but the modern mother who can afford it is kept in bed and fed up until



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Dora Heed



SYLVIA OF SARAWAK

From seventeen to twenty-four years old.

her bed becomes a mere lake of milk. If she nurses the baby, it becomes a weakling for life: if it is stodged with — Food or the like, it becomes powerful and healthy beyond its years. Female invalids always explain 'My mother thought it her duty to nurse me.' Moral: nurse only if you find it voluptuous; and give the baby a good dinner afterwards.

I cross to Folkestone to-morrow and go for the week-end to my rectory at Ayot St. Lawrence, Welwyn, Herts. On Monday I must come to London, as I have a lecture to deliver. I am open to inspect Elizabeth, ■ an excuse for conversing with the parents she has disgraced, after that day. Have you seen *Androcles*? it's an ideal play for children; but I doubt if it will run until Elizabeth is advanced enough to be taken to it.

G. B. S."

Early in August I took the children up to Scotland where my father and mother and Zena and her family were staying. There had been persistent and disquieting rumours of war with Germany into which my father could foresee, and always had foreseen, England would be dragged whether she wished to be or not.

Sir John French came hurriedly north to see my father. He had been warned that he would be put in Command of all the Forces. Did he appreciate the honour bestowed upon him? I daresay in a way, but never before had I seen him so preoccupied and worried. I tried to tease him out of a mood I had never seen him in. I tried to encourage him with praise and flattering affection. But he would have none of it. His eyes seemed shadowed, and up and down the garden he paced, his hands thrust deep into his pockets. "This is too much for me," he kept repeating over and over again. "I don't like it, Sylvia—I tell you I don't like it."

"It will be over in a month," I assured him with the utmost hopefulness, for that was what we all thought—everyone thought in those early days of the war. But again the shake

of the head, the frown, the shadowed look. "I shall do my best," he said, "but will my best be good enough, I wonder."

Poor little General. Poor little cavalry leader. Dragged from his simple soldiering into a world war. Forced into a conflict not only of weapons but of words.

I was in a desperate position with hundreds of miles of ocean between Vynér and myself. I could not make up my mind where my duty lay most, with him or with my children. My father, Maurice, everyone seemed connected in this war. But I seemed outside it, as if I did not belong in England at all. My father was in the turmoil of London's organization. He seemed to me to be the pivot on which the war was swinging. He was like a meteor that flashed hither and thither leaving a ray of encouragement and hope wherever he went. Many were jealous of him. He had no scheduled work, no red tape tied him hand and foot. He was a free agent and could interfere without being interfered with. There were no rules whereby he could be caught. He gave his services and was not paid for them. His knowledge of French made him indispensable to an army that was so purely British. Like a mosquito, he buzzed at the heels of politicians and of generals. They may not always have wanted him, and yet they knew they could not do without him.

The effect of the war in Sarawak reached me in small doses. Apparently all profiteering had been closely guarded against. The prices of foodstuffs and all other commodities were ordered to remain at the same price as before, and any person disobeying this order was severely punished. A committee was then formed to regulate the foodstuffs from time to time in accordance with the prices ruling in Singapore.

What they most feared apparently was a shortage of rice, owing to the withdrawal of the German ships on the run, but they started well with the arrival of over two thousand bags of rice from Singapore and between six and seven hundred bags of flour. Unfortunately there was no milk, and a rumour reached Sarawak that no foodstuffs were allowed to leave Singapore. But as usual when a great move has been made there was only a momentary chaos, and then everything shook itself down into its slot again. Owing to Vynér's excellent management and the enthusiastic co-operation of his Govern-

ment officers everything adjusted itself into a perfect routine and the danger of panic was suppressed.

I am dwelling mostly on what took place in Sarawak during the war, because everyone in England knows what England did and has read of it over and over again. It was hardest of all for the Malays to realize that great nations had risen and were slaying one another mercilessly. "What is it for?" they kept asking, and those more educated than the others said: "Surely the Germans have the enlarged liver." But how could it be explained to these people who were without desire or ambition that the nations were at war for supremacy and power and little else. Even then they would not have understood. The only things they could understand were the rise and fall of prices, the sufficiency of rice and the condition of their trade. So the actual war passed over their gentle heads conveying nothing to them. They sang and they beat their drums just the same; they basked in the sun and gossiped in their houses, far more concerned in the fact that their neighbour's wife had a lover than that the Europe they imagined they could see from the topmost rung of the wireless was convulsed in a mighty conflict, on the issue of which so much depended. Many of Sarawak's younger officers returned to England either to rejoin their regiments or to enlist in the new army. But so many of our men were brothers, and the Rajah had issued a decree that only one brother would be permitted to resign, not both. Of course, he was obliged to safeguard the Sarawak Service. "In spite of the war, Sarawak must go on," was his argument. Nevertheless, he need not have been so hard and unrelenting, he need not have meted out such a reluctant sanction to their going. If any of his men resigned it was to be on the distinct understanding that their services in Sarawak were at an end. Many of them were poor, with families dependent on them. They could not afford to throw up a permanent job for patriotism, however much they might desire to. It was not easy for those left brothers, whose urge for fighting was as strong as the ones who had enlisted, and I have always felt more sorry for the ones that remained in the Service than for those who had elected to resign.

My father-in-law left England in November of that year, which enabled Vyner to return to me. It was then for the first

time perhaps the true nature of his character was revealed. He would not, could not, rest without doing something, no matter what, so long as he did not stand apart from it all. He refused all favouritism, throwing up jobs he knew in his heart he had only been able to obtain on account of his position. I never knew from day to day that he had not enlisted as an ordinary private, for he came in gleefully one morning and announced that he had passed his medical with flying colours. This was not a bad accomplishment for a man over forty, who had only half a liver, and who had spent most of his years out East.

I had also, so to speak, done my bit. I had taken over an empty house in Callander called Inverleny. This house commanded a fine view of the surrounding country and had large and spacious rooms. I turned it into a military extension hospital for the sick and wounded soldiers who were sent to me from the 4th Scottish General Hospital at Stolehill, Glasgow.

There were twenty-one beds in my little Extension Hospital, and seventy-five cases had gone through my hands from the time of its opening. These cases had come from fifteen different British regiments and from several units of the Belgian Army. The duties of nursing were undertaken by the Voluntary Aid Detachment of the British Red Cross Society, of which Zena and I were active members. We were also members of the hospital governing body, and I had made Vynner the President without even asking his consent. We worked very hard, Zena and I, and I think we performed our full share of the onerous duties which fell to the lot of Red Cross nurses. There were five wards, a large dining-room, men's recreation-room, board-room, matron's quarters, and excellent kitchen and service arrangements, and the whole had been furnished by me in blue and white colouring. The medical officers were A. Jordan Beattie, Esq., M.D. (Edinburgh) and William Harvey, Esq., M.D. (Glasgow), and we had nurses that were mostly local girls. The amazing part of it was that Zena was so much more capable than I was. She could do almost anything in the wards without flinching. I only had two cases. One, a man whose knee had been badly cut, and Dr. Beattie was obliged to reopen the wound and

dress it and clean it and stitch it again. He asked me to hold the man's leg whilst he put in the stitches. I did so, but I nearly died from the effect. The sound of that needle popping to and fro through the somewhat tough skin thundered in my ears. The "ping" of the gut being pulled through, the man writhing a little as I held him, made me feel faint with nausea and disgust. My mouth was parched—goose flesh ran up the calves of my legs. When the operation was over I was obliged to retire and be sick.

The other case was merely washing a man's foot that had the third toe missing. It was not a new wound, but was perfectly healed, and he was in the home for some entirely other reason. That gap in his foot haunted me. I could not sleep for the thought of it. It came between me and everything I did, and once more this awful nausea assailed me. I resigned from the nursing department and retired into the pantry. It was my duty to feed the men and wash the dishes afterwards. I also became the entertainer at night and organized concert parties, for which I played the piano. I liked the men and I think they liked me. "You smell good, Ma'am," they kept telling me. "Come and stand over 'ere where we can get it."

Zena looked beautiful in her nurse's uniform, and you can imagine how impressed they were by having this famous musical comedy star to look after them. I had great trouble with my Red Cross apron because they were all the scheduled size of an average woman. I simply could not find one to fit me, and most of the time the red cross that should have been upon my chest was reposing peacefully on my stomach.

I also added to my responsibilities by becoming a member of the Callander Belgian Refugee Committee, and it was a pathetic sight to see this little group of lonely strangers walking about the town. They had sad little songs they sang, and some of the very young boys had the purest of voices. What happened to them I do not remember because when Vyner returned I left Scotland and my nursing home went on without me.

Vyner eventually announced to me that he had joined the Anti-Aircraft and was stationed on the top of Cannon Street Hotel. But even this did not satisfy him, they knew who he was and it annoyed him. He ended by dropping a cartridge belt

filled with cartridges from the top of the roof, and this so unnerved him that he retired from the job.

A little later he had made his way into some aeroplane works at Shoreditch, and there he stood, hour upon hour, before a counter and made little bits of steel for aeroplanes on a lathe. Nobody knew him. He was just C. V. Brooke, as grimy and tired as they were. Whenever he arrived in a clean collar they cheered him to the echo and plied him with questions as to how he had obtained it. I daresay those days at Shoreditch were some of the happiest he had ever spent, in spite of the dirt and the hard work that they entailed, for at last his identity was lost, and men were accepting him for his true worth. He enjoyed the friendliness of these rough-and-ready people who helped him with his bits of steel and saved him from getting into trouble as the inspector made his round. He did not get home until some late hour in the evening, his hands begrimed by oil and dirt, his body aching from standing and stooping for so long. But he was happier than I had seen him for many years. Harry had rejoined the Lancashire Regiment, and Adeh, in the intervals of being in Sarawak, went back to his gunners and lectured and trained the young men who were on their way out to the War. My father and mother were doing arduous work in France, Oliver was at the War Office, Maurice was Provost Marshal of Paris, and Doll stayed with and was befriended by Lady Ottoline Morrell, who possessed one of the most lovely houses I have seen, near Oxford.

On December 2nd, 1915, my last baby was born. A girl, of course it was a girl, I knew before Simmie told me, when I saw him fling up his hands in despair. I was not destined to create a future Rajah. Sometimes I feel glad, and free with the knowledge that no son of mine can wreck the dynasty and pull down what had been built with such fine hands. Adeh had a son. A boy well fitted to carry on the Brooke tradition. Rather an exceptional boy in his way, and one he might well be proud of. I am proud of my girls. They are lovable and lovely. They have given me wonderful years of happiness and made my life content.

I called my baby Valerie. She was a strange-looking child at first, but the thing I adored about her most was the tiny

curls that grew like little feathers round her head. She was born in No. 9 John Street. And very soon after that we went out East.

We lived at Wimbledon during most of Vyner's leave, and while we were there I endeavoured to induce him to meet some of my friends. It seemed so strange and inexplicable to be married to a man who had never been seen, and I was confronted by suspicious and mischievous minds who regarded my home life as either evil or unhappy. Vyner had always been a hermit. Ever since I could remember him he had dug himself into whatever place he happened to be living in, and there he had remained, contented and at peace. The idea of going to a party or a dance filled him with fear. He would rather have plunged headlong into a volcano and died instantly than the slow, torturing extinction of Society. "Sweet young things" and dear old ladies in a mass sent him panic-stricken to his room. He had no conversation for them and no desire to listen long to theirs. Yet whenever he was cornered and forced to meet my friends he was adored by them, and they would glare at me as much as to say: "The jealous cat, I believe she keeps him away from us on purpose."

I did finally induce him to go with me and dine with Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland, who had a house then not very far from where we lived. The whole time he was dressing for that dinner party his eyes were starting out of his head. "This is awful," he kept saying. "Supposing they are rude to me?"

"But why should they be rude to you?" I argued. "People don't ask people to dinner merely to insult them."

All the way to the house he sat in a stiffened stupor, and I made a mental note that never again would I attempt to take him out. It was not worth it. I felt bruised and exhausted, as if I had been rolled on. My head ached and my lips were dry, and I was terrified as to what he would do before the evening was over. Who the women were on either side of him during dinner I cannot remember, but I was exactly

opposite, and I found myself speechless and paralysed, watching him and how he behaved. He seemed to be frankly bored for a while, and then one of the women attracted his attention. I could not hear what they were saying, but I had never in my life before seen Vyner so enthralled. There was upon his face as he listened to her a rapt and almost holy look, and I must confess I envied the woman who had brought that expression into his eyes. "You did very well at dinner," I said on the way home. "What on earth was she saying that made you so absorbed?" He laughed, flinging himself back in the car in glorious relaxation. "It wasn't what she was saying," he chuckled, "but damn it all, I could see all down her dress."

I have never taken him out to dinner again, for if I did he swore to me he would tear off his trousers and be banished from society for ever, and gradually I ceased to want to go myself, and I let things slide, forgetting that one day my babies would grow up and want to see everyone and go everywhere themselves. You so very soon lose touch if you drop for one instant from the social rung. But Vyner and I never thought of that. All we knew was that we did not seem to belong to England. We were Sarawakian, body and soul.

We then prepared for our second visit to Sarawak. At first it was arranged that Doll should accompany us, and she seemed enthusiastic at the idea, but right at the last moment she changed her mind. She was unable, I suppose, to tear herself away from her friends and her painting, although if only she had realized it there was more scope for her style in Sarawak than anywhere else in the world.

One night when we were out at a theatre we met Doris Stocker and I introduced her to Vyner. She was one of the prettiest and sweetest girls who had ever graced the chorus of the Gaiety Theatre stage. Vyner was immediately attracted. There was no nonsense about Doris, she was simple and direct, and had a caustic humour that was fascinating; and Vyner with his habitual impulsiveness asked her if she would come out to Sarawak with us. Doris, who was no stranger to the East but almost a complete stranger to us, accepted the invitation. It was brave of her really, and when she began to know Vyner better she realized how brave, but on the whole I think she enjoyed her trip and we all became the greatest of friends.

Vyner could not help teasing Doris, he teased her about everything. At first she was hurt, and then puzzled, and then she learned to laugh with him, and I believe to this day she can remember every detail of that journey East with us.

As there was no room for us all at the Astana on account of the Rajah being there we went to stay at the Residency. It was there we first came across Mr. Ward's Dyak "boy" Jumil, and I regret to say that we lured him away from Mr. Ward and made him our head boy, and he has been with us ever since. Jumil seemed to me to be one of Sarawak's perfect products. He was graceful and quiet, and he could do everything in the house far better and more delicately than a woman. I had brought out with me a Scotch maid called "Cameron," and it would have been very lonely indeed for her had not Jumil been there to help her.

There was no mixed club in Sarawak when I first went out. There was a club for the men, with billiards and bowls and tennis, and then there was a little building clamped to the side of the Rock Road they had christened the "Ladies' Club." Here we would sit in the evenings and wait for men, and believe me or not, it was a long, long period of inaction. If a man passed along the road we would all rear our heads and try and mesmerise him over the hedge to join us. There were not enough of us to play tennis or bridge, so we were forced to discuss one another and tear one another to shreds. It may not have been premeditated neglect on the part of the men, and it was not that they bore us any malice. It was simply the fashion in Sarawak to keep away from petticoat influence. If a man was seen talking to a woman he was nominated a "poodle faker," and if he so much as dared to approach me he was told that he was trying to "get at me" for promotion. Even Doris, with her prettiness and charm, was obliged to play golf by herself. The barrier between male and female in Sarawak at that time was a definite one. The Rajah disapproved of marriage. If any of his Government officers married he said they lost 90 per cent of their efficiency. This, in its way, was true enough, but it was a dangerous doctrine. It drove men into living lives that they might afterwards regret, and imbosomed them in the very earth of this Eastern country so that part of them would remain buried there until eternity.

The Rajah took a great fancy to Doris, and I think in his grim, unapproachable way he tried to be amiable and pleasant. There was an extremely undesirable ceremony called "Band Days," when once a week we all dressed up in our best and gathered round the Rajah upon a stretch of grass where the band would play classical music, and we would respectfully listen to discordant sounds that fortunately for him he could not hear. The Rajah's favourites would sit on either side of him, and at intervals they would scream some trivial remarks into his ear. These he would reply to at times, but more often than not he would continue beating the ground with his stick. We dared not leave until the band had laboured through their list, we just sat there devoured by mosquitoes and pouring with sweat. Those that were not his favourites felt like so many worms wriggling on hooks from which they could never escape. The Rajah was like that. He took every bit of confidence out of everybody, and a more unnatural crowd of European females could not have been found anywhere than those that mustered round the bandstand once a week.

Sometimes the Rajah would take me for a drive. He had ■ spirited pony from Singapore which he drove in a diminutive dog-cart. He wanted to show me the country, so he said, but we nearly always landed in the ditch. This by no means perturbed the grand old man, and he would drag himself and the pony and cart and me with dignity into the road. "A little frisky," he would say, thoughtfully regarding the bucking pony. "No vice, just wants to play, that's all."

In sheer desperation I started a small and extremely exclusive dance club. It was not in reality a club, but a small selection of people who gathered together in one another's houses and danced to a well-worn and damp-riddled gramophone. I called it the "Kilema Club," and nothing but Hawaiian music was permitted to be played. There were six members: myself and Doris, Mr. and Mrs. Slade, Mr. Bryan and Dr. Hanton, an American, whom I liked very much. Sometimes the meeting-places would be up-river, and we used to go by launch. It was lovely returning by moonlight with the little tinkling gramophone playing the music that seemed to stir one's heart and bring tears into one's eyes. It

may seem absurd to say so, but we became romantic and our emotions were deep. Music and moonlight and the East—what more could anybody possibly desire. It captivated and filled us with strange, pleasurable dreams. We hardly spoke to one another as the launch moved noiselessly through the wide river, with the palm trees feathering against the sky and large unsubstantial shadows moving across the hills. We found we were becoming too serious, and I was obliged to close my club. Vyner, who had never been a member of it, and who in his heart disapproved of the whole affair, had warned me that it would not last. It was a contrast, that was all. A relaxation from the Rajah and his formal receptions and parties that held no life in them.

I think Doris Stocker enjoyed her visit to Sarawak although it was filled with bitter moments. It must have seemed incomprehensible to her how apart and unfriendly our Government officers were. But they had their own standards, their own flag to fly and their own policy to keep. I will try and describe ■ Sarawak reception as it was in the days of Charles Brooke. The Rajah would invite the whole of the Kuching community, that is the European community, to a dinner. He did not invite them because he was anxious to see them, but because it was one of his duties as Ruler of a State to be officially polite to its inhabitants. The guests would know they were not really wanted before they arrived, and it must be admitted that he would make little effort to alter this conjecture. Vyner and I would stand awkwardly behind him and help him receive these reluctant and trembling visitors, who filed unsmilingly up the stairs towards us. There would be a little small talk on the veranda before dinner whilst drinks were being offered round. Once more the Rajah's favourites would flutter to his side like chiffon butterflies, and in shrill voices and little trills of unnatural laughter endeavour to convey to those who were not in his favour what a wonderful time they were having. Very heated and agitated, I would move from one to another, my voice also unnaturally loud and a kind of fixed grin on my crimson face. Vyner would ooze away from his father ■ far as he could, and now and again his laugh would ring out, and it would sound almost indecent in that solemn house of gloom.

The men were divided from the women like sheep from the goats. There was no need for them to be divided, but this was their way. They meant to show us and the Rajah that his policy was upheld, so the meeting of males continued on one side of the room, whilst we sat in a row on an iron bench and talked in thin whispers to one another until dinner was announced.

At dinner our tongues were loosened a little, but most of all those of the Rajah's favourites could be heard screaming: "Yes, Rajah. . . . Oh no, Rajah. . . . Do you think so, Rajah?" at stated intervals. After dinner, coffee, liqueurs and cigars on the veranda outside. There was no electric light in those days and the Astana was lit by hurricane lamps that blew out every time the sea breeze sprang up and plunged us in darkness. The moment the hurricane lamps were lit, enormous bats would circle round our heads, and beetles the size of birds would come smacking against our bare arms and away again. Then quite suddenly, in the midst of some conversation, the Rajah would rise to his feet and, moving to the head of the stairs, stand there with his hand held out stiffly to bid his trembling guests farewell. I had never seen a host actually enforce departure before I met the Rajah, but the hand held out was a definite indication that his party was over for that night.

To compare these parties with the parties of to-day, the wonderful riotous evenings with Vyner at his very best. I know no better host than he can be when he wants to, and yet I have seen him die on his guests sometimes in less than thirty minutes.

Sarawak takes its moods from its Rajah. If he is gay, well, then they are. If he is quiet, they are steeped in silence too. They watch and wait, and hang upon his humour. It is a man's country, this Sarawak in the sun.

I had sent J. M. Barrie my little play called *The Dream of Iola* to read, and very soon after I arrived in Sarawak I received his reply.

"DEAR SYLVIA,

How far away my address must seem to you now. I suppose letters have a way (tho' it puzzles me to guess how) of outstripping human travellers, so perhaps we shall be there as soon as you . . . there to open the door to you to ask you to walk right in. On the other hand we may find you settled down and an authority on matters which when we last talked you had still to refer to Vyner. I hope you will read this sitting in your gold dress on the throne. I fondly hope you will tell your chamberlain to shut up for a minute while you go thro' your correspondence.

I read the play and passed it on to Shaw, who says boastfully that he is your second literary father. He said it was your instructions that this should be done. I think a great deal of it very charming—all this going away, especially the second going away, which is of real imaginative quality. In the way of criticism I should say you were writing under two impulses, the one romantic, which is the one I think you should have stuck to all along. And the other a terrible modern thing, the innocent girl and her fall thro' too much innocence. A very good subject, of course, but it seems to me to clash with the other. One can't, I think, follow poetry and social reform at the same time—they won't run together. What I take off my hat to most is the spirit behind the play, it all comes from a very pure soul and a fine sympathetic mind. Leonora will know a deal about her mother when she reads it. . . .

The Peter statue was put up yesterday and looks well. The place was prepared a long time in advance, so now it looks as if it had been there a long time. . . ."

A little later he wrote again, a letter that was delayed and did not reach me for a long time.

"I said 'Alas,'" he began, "(first time I ever said it and one doesn't say it except in poetry when you come to think of it), on hearing my letter was not there to greet you on arrival. I had thought it would be in time, and modestly conceived it helping to line the halls and salaaming and calling 'Welcome.'

Your picture of the scene on the steps of the palace is graphic, and I have it before me, even with some little bits you left out, as tho' you trembled. It was rather a delicious trembling that, and if the words which quivered on your lips could have been taken down by some delicate instrument, they would have been found to be: 'How is this for High ^a,' or to that effect. Your father and mother lunched with me at the flat the other day, and have promised to come to the Scotch fishing I have taken this year. It is about as far away as Sarawak, it is a house called Amhuinnsuidh (or thereabouts) in the Hebrides (North Harris) and the nearest net station is a whaling station ten miles away. Your father used sometimes to stay in the house as a boy and steal out to poach in the river.

I went out to 'Shakespeare's England' and won four beautiful watches by my prowess. Never knew till then what it was to be admired and envied.

I am trying to write a play called *The Legend of Leonora*, of which the title is so far the best. Also one called *The Little Policeman*, also *The Ladies' Shakespeare*, also *Rosalind*, also *Half an Hour*. Too many. They will probably all go into the basket together.

Went to Cambridge to see the A.D.C. there do *Admirable Crichton*. Rather quaint, undergraduates ■ the ladies.

I am looking forward to having the picture of you in the Malay dress.

With love to you both and hoping to hear soon again.

Ever yours,

J. M. B."

These letters from J. M. Barrie inspired me to begin once more my literary life. So I sat me down and started on a novel. We always rose in the morning at six a.m. and went out on to the veranda. This was the lovely time in Sarawak, cool and misty and sweet smelling. It was easy to write under those conditions and after a glass of iced pineapple juice I would settle down to work.

This new book of mine was not to be an ordinary novel. I selected for my theme the mythical and unsubstantial manner

of the East to follow a soul on its journey through any planes. In the foreword I said that we were "toys" and that our souls were dressed up in our bodies like dolls in a shop window, and that God was the shopman who stood behind the counter whilst your mother and the mothers of all your friends came to buy as customers; and that was how babies were born.

The toyshop was the world, and God, the Inventor, dealt out and mended and destroyed. I likened Him to the sculptor with his chisel and his mallet creating an image from clay. "But God had more formidable a task," I said, "stooping over the world and creating man out of a rib."

I had never believed that death was a barrier of separation. I had never felt that life was an insoluble riddle, the answer to which was only death. Souls marched on. That was my theme, and human beings were but toys for God to play with.

It was partly an Eastern idea that made me write this book, put into my head by one of the greatest philosophers in Japan, who believed and thought of things that to the Western mind might have seemed absurd. This Japanese philosopher was the skipper on one of the Nippon Yusen line. He had one of the noblest and most gentle faces I have ever seen. "I have known you in a former life," he said to me as we stood on the bridge of his ship together, a soft breeze stirring our hair, and a million tropical stars above our heads. "But it is not given to you to recognize me yet. When your soul has been through several planes, then it will touch mine, and you will remember me." All this may sound to you as if I had been going very deeply into the doctrine of the reincarnation and transmigration of souls. Maybe if I had been a little more Utopian and visionary I might have let loose upon this form of introspection. But *Toys* was a novel, and in it I tried to bring myself and my children and their strange connection with the East. I tried to imagine Leonora and Elizabeth grown up, and Elizabeth, whom I always called "the Little Black Sheep" owing to her amazing darkness, inheriting some oriental soul that made her beautiful and cruelly savage. I enjoyed writing this book. I could indulge in fanciful ideas, and wander in a range of East and West. Have not you been to places that have seemed to you

familiar even to a turn in the road, and the shape of a certain hill? Have not the tones of a certain voice recalled things—strange dim things that you cannot quite locate? There was a boy I heard of once who lived in a remote village, and he became a great musician. It was not inherited, for his parents could neither read nor write, and they were tone deaf to every musical sound.

By the time I had but roughly completed this book, my visit to Sarawak was at an end, and Doris and I packed up our boxes and prepared to depart. We went home on the Japanese Mail Steamer *Mujazaki Maru*, as, owing to the War it was thought safer to travel homeward via the Cape. Mr. G. M. Gifford travelled with us as far as Ceylon. He was one of our most spectacular young officers. It was he who had led a small force into action in an expedition called "The Gaat," and successfully routed the rebel Dyaks so that they lost all their war boats and more than half their men. For this success the Rajah had rewarded him with a sword of honour, and promotion. G. M. Gifford was an unusual type of man. His appeal to women was unquestionable. He had a fine wrathful face and blue eyes that slanted at the corners, and all he really lived for was riding and his brother Barry who was at that time fighting in France. I did not know Barry then. I had not met him. Strange, how fate unwinds a tangled skein, and through the network of time and spaces these brothers became my greatest friends.

For Vyner and I to make friends in Sarawak was not easy. It created jealousy and discontent throughout the Service. We tried so hard to be impartial, but it was not humanly possible. We could not avoid having our favourites, but we have learned at last the full bitterness of our mistakes and the unhappiness we caused ourselves and those we selected as our friends. "For each man kills the thing he loves," G. M. Gifford used to quote to me, and when I look back upon those brothers and trace the years of our affection, I know that my friendship for them was their death blow. Vyner was fortunate with his women friends but unlucky with his men. We can laugh now when we think over what has passed because as we grow older we cease to care so much. We are self-sufficient. We need no one. Our children



LEONORA

VALERIE

ELIZABETH

Photograph taken by the Rajah.



Hugh Cecil

RAJAH



Timbridge

RANEE

have grown up and become our interest. We say to ourselves why search outside for companionship when we have them. And so we shall hibernate within our home and be content.

It was wonderful on that trip home to feel myself drawing nearer and nearer to my children. To try and picture what they would be like and how much they had changed, and ■ I entered the front door I was almost shy of them. I felt an intruder, a stranger in their midst.

Leonora had grown considerably, but she was still infinitely timid. She had a wistful look that twisted my heart. I could feel there was something wrong somewhere, but I could not locate it. She seemed at that time to live in a world of her own, I used to call it Leonora's half-way house, for she was like a pendulum swinging all the time between light and dark, joy and sorrow. She seemed to others too nervous to be attractive, she was consumed and overrun with imagination. She could not keep pace with her ideas. "They come in crowds, Mummie," she would say.

"What come, darling?"

"Things," she would reply, and her eyes would widen with fear. I remember my youth, and the agony of mind I had been in. I knew so well—so well what she was feeling.

Elizabeth was different. What was so remarkable about Elizabeth was the creamy whiteness of her skin, the exquisite beauty of her eyes, and her hair like a black frame round her full, wide face. She was rather a dull little girl and would cling to one word for a whole day, repeating and repeating it until the sound of it was like the cawing of a rook. She was strong and self-assured. She knew so exactly what she wanted. If she could not get what she wanted she would go into one of her "black devil" moods and sulk indefinitely in her room. The clock seemed to turn backwards as I looked at Elizabeth, and once more I was at Orchard Lea with the sulky little boy in his sailor suit. I could see Maurice, his dark brows lowering over his eyes, waiting to get his way. And then Elizabeth with her black devils waiting to get hers.

Valerie was just a delicious bundle of short curls and short lace frocks. Her hair was of a pale gold and in ringlets, lovely dancing ringlets that curled round your finger as you pulled them. She was not pretty, but there was promise in

the broad high cheek-bones and wide brown eyes, and ■ I looked at my three babies I said to myself that although I had no son, these three had compensated me in full.

The tension of the War was still acute. On Wimbledon Common there were aeroplanes and pilots, and men were out in camp there. I used to take the children to Wimbledon station to see the troops start off there for the Front, and we would buy boxes and boxes of cigarettes and throw them down on to the station from the bridge. Once a train went under the bridge when Leonora was standing on it, and I shall never forget her screams that carried far above the noise of the moving train. I had not been home long when I heard that the Rajah had been taken suddenly ill, and owing to his great age it was causing the utmost anxiety. But strange to relate, in the next letter I received, the wonderful old man had rallied and once more he was receiving visitors and attending to State affairs. The Rajah's recovery had been wonderful and had caused heartfelt relief throughout the country. It was arranged that he should leave Singapore and travel home, accompanied by Mr. H. B. Crocker.

During the Rajah's illness daily prayers had been offered up in the Mosque by the Datu Imaum, Tuan Belal and Tuan Khalib, on behalf of the Mohammedan community, and when he so far recovered that he was able to travel home, the Datu Imaum celebrated the occasion by giving a thanksgiving feast at the Mosque to which several hundred people were invited.

Before the month was over, the Rajah was well enough to leave for England. A wonderful accomplishment for a man of over eighty. But he was like an oak tree that had embedded its roots so deep into the earth it could not fall. The Malays all said he was so tenacious of life, there was no end. Everlasting and eternal he would be with them for ever.

When I had been settled in England for ■ while I began to look about me. I found Doll had encircled herself by brilliant and æsthetic people—Strachey, the two Huxleys, Aldous and Julian, Siegfried Sassoon, and so on and so forth.

I would go down to Lady Ottoline Morrell's, and sit in so colourful surroundings and listen to such brilliant conversation I would feel like a tramp who had plunged into a velvet setting. I met Alec Waugh and his brilliant brother, Alan. Julian Huxley was beloved by all my children. There was a lovely girl who was a companion governess to Lady Ottoline's little child, and when I looked at this girl I said to myself, "When I am in need of a governess I will have her."

Sir John French was in London. I wrote and suggested we should meet. He replied from a large house he had taken in Lancaster Gate. It was only a short letter, but it was sweet.

"MY DEAR SYLVIA,

What a dear sweet little letter you wrote me on March 21st.

I have had terrible worries, but things are quieter now. So long as the Army keeps calm, dignified and deliberate, I am happy and content.

I expect you are away somewhere. Probably in Scotland. Send me a line, dear, when you get this and we'll arrange to meet and have a talk.

Your dear affectionate friendship touches me deeply.

Yours always, dear Sylvia,

J. F."

We often met. Lovely quiet dinners, gloriously long discussions. The War, always the War, and the bright blue of his eyes a little shadowed, and his laugh a little dead. I could feel his unhappiness, his uneasiness about it all. Yet he would not change, he would be himself and suffer his own faults. "If I am like that, I must be like that," he would say. "I am too old to change."

I told him he was childish in his violence against things, that he must give a little and let others take. But he would splutter and fume with rage, and no argument would move him, and gradually my father saw that the road he was on was a dangerous one, and left a space between himself and the little General that widened as the years went on.

Then I wrote to G. M. Gifford's brother Barry, and asked him if he would dine with me in London. Three times he refused, and it was only a long time afterwards I discovered he had no money for the railway fare. He had been to Rouen with the 4th Infantry Division after spending only two weeks in England. He had then been attached to the 3rd Battalion Middlesex Regiment, reported missing in the casualty lists, a report that had been contradicted later when he was discovered in the Royal Free Hospital (Red Cross Department), Gray's Inn Road, suffering from severe gas poisoning and suppressed shell-shock. When he had first been taken to this hospital, he had been delirious, and for days and nights he talked Malay incessantly. One night he crawled under the bed and talked Malay from there, and it had only been a mere chance that some Colonel, an inmate of the hospital, could speak this language, and after many hours lured Barry back to bed again.

As soon as he had been passed as medically fit once more he joined the R.F.C. and he won for himself honours and praise for the daring courage with which he flew, and the almost reckless good-humour with which he soared above the enemy's lines. But these shell-shocked men were never really cured, there was always something evil lurking in their minds, a horror never to be spoken of, never to be lived down. Barry became my greatest friend, he was a charming and extremely lovable man, but the shadow of this War remained with him always, and drove him slowly but surely to an early death.

War may be glorious and valiant to the young, but what about the aftermath. What of the years of memories of terror unbelievable, of blood and torn limbs and shattered souls. It is the men who have survived the peace after the war that are the heroes, the men who have drawn themselves free of the horror and been able to enjoy life once again. Barry could not. He tried, but he failed, and I saw my friend fall deeper and deeper into such a profound melancholy, no drink nor drug could be of help to him.

It was a hectic and unnatural phase to live in. The War seemed to have broken down convention and restraint.

Englishmen became almost human, and there was a kind of wild freedom spreading throughout the world. It must be confessed that men played upon the sentiments of women. They had a fine sympathetic role to play. "I may be dead to-morrow," was their plea, and that little sentence was responsible for the tragedies and comedies of those who stayed at home. There were no morals, there could be none. Maybe in war there should not be restraint of any kind. Mothers, sisters, sweethearts, all had that sentence on their lips. "He may be dead to-morrow" and there was nothing they could refuse—nothing.

I went to see my parents in Paris. It was an uncomfortable and extraordinary journey. I was alone, but strangely enough not in the least afraid. I crossed the Channel by night, and arrived in Paris at dawn. Had it not been for a charming *chasseur* I should never have reached the Hotel Meurice unless I had done so on foot. This good-natured and helpful young man hauled me and my box on to a lorry and there we sat with our legs swinging and discussed the War ■ we rumbled over the cobble-stones.

I went to mysterious and secret places near the lines, and one little hut I remember between Ham and Noyon, where a charming woman served out hot coffee and soup to the mud-soiled and half-dazed men who staggered in from the firing line to get warm. Not long after I had been there I heard that she had gone into the hut one morning and, raising her head and sniffing, she had announced slowly that she smelled "death." She had then gone to her room and written to England all that she wished done if anything should happen to her. A few hours later she had been shot by a half-demented soldier who had rushed into the hut to have his soup.

I went to see Sir John French, who had a little flat at the top of an hotel. I found him despondent and embittered, and he blamed everybody because they would not understand him. He could not get what he wanted, or do what he wanted. His hands were tied, so he said. A little later, when I had been back from Paris several weeks, I heard that he was returning and Douglas Haig had taken his place. I wrote to my father. I daresay my letter must have seemed

excitable and foolish. After all, I did not know the circumstances. This was part of his reply:

"As for the little General, I have always understood his pain. It was largely his own fault. Largely that of the popular institution under which we live. There is no infinite patience or any consideration in democracies. William of Orange who fought splendidly without ever a success would never have been tolerated in these days. The General loves and hates very like the winds. He is *not* devoted to me. . . . I know his majestic (not religious) side well. I know his 'Philosophy' too. All these queer meanderings of his mind are interesting enough. I agree. It is they, and a warm enough heart (at moments) that make him lovable. But then he can be and is so unrestraining in violence that one only thinks of him as a tiresome child one wishes to shut up in a dark room. There is no 'mis-understanding.' It takes two to make one. . . . However, I am glad you dined with him. I do not like to feel that after so many years of friendship a man breaks wholly with the past. Meanwhile, I will not modify my relations to Haig or other people by a hair's breadth."

I had several letters from my father. I think perhaps I expounded my theories and views of the wildness and wickednesses of war in a somewhat priggish and pedantic manner. I tried to make excuses for myself and others, he would have none of them.

"SYV, DARLING (he said), I am not angry, although I do not approve of kissing and telling. It spoils the romance of life. . . . Vynar and his wife are a rum couple. You cannot take *me* in, and I do not know why you should. You are a creature of cross currents: and very attractive it is. I do not wish you otherwise. But I despise people who wear their conduct on their sleeves! Think that over.

The War hops along, and personally I think it will end fairly soon. Everyone is sick to death of it. Nothing puts out a fire like damp weather. Well, that is the atmosphere everywhere."

The last letter I had from him in France was written from somewhere near the General Headquarters.

"We are here for some days (he said). It is a rest in a way, and as it is within reach of the devastated area it enables Nellie to see about the Villages that she is mothering. . . . I wish we were all at home together. In common with everyone out here, I am dead sick of the war. It is a dreadful trial if it goes over this winter. I cannot believe it yet."

But the War went on and on until in the end it seemed almost an institution. We forgot what it had been to have free food and a clear sky. We became used to the air-raid signals and people hurrying underground. The lists and lists of dead were but columns in the paper, impossible to read them all, so each man read only the initials that he knew.

I then received a letter from Bernard Shaw that must have been written soon after Valerie was born and trailed its way out to Sarawak and back.

"MY DEAR SYLVIA (he said). This is ridiculous. It is very noble of you to try to make up for the waste of war at this rate; but there are limits. You are always having babies. It would not matter in Sarawak, which ought to be peopled entirely by babies of yours running about in the woods naked; but such tropical luxuriance is rash in London. Don't exhaust yourself. No doubt you, the mother of the 'infinitesimal,' are the irresistible; but you must learn to defend yourself. . . .

I have been on the point of writing to you lots of times during the last eighteen months; but my work exhausts my capacity for forming sentences on paper. And now that I do write I have nothing to say except that I am in the country and can only send you a little play which is not very amusing unless you can hear the brogue in it and know what my countrymen and women are like.

Where do you live now when you are not scattering infants about? . . . Always respected Princess and ever dearest Sylvia,

Your devoted,
G. B. S."

A little later he wrote again but only upon a card.

"Don't ask me to write or even think until rehearsals for my play are over. Your letters have been one of my few delights. I have had to write three plays within the last few months in the intervals of doing other things; and I am dead beyond speech and almost beyond motion. . . ."

Then quite suddenly I was taken ill. I thought perhaps I had strained myself inside, and I did everything I could to deaden the pain, but in the end I was forced to consult a doctor. "Simmie" sent me immediately to a nursing home for a minor operation, four days at the outside I think he said it would be. I was in that nursing home four months with septic poisoning, and having morphia day and night. I shall never forget that illness, and how I kept wondering if it was possible for anyone to go quite mad from pain. Every joint on every finger was swollen and wrapped in cotton-wool. One of my ankles was in a cage to keep it still, and it was as if someone stood over it and brought an enormous mallet down upon the nerves at stated intervals. My whole body was in torture. It was the awful horror of fighting it alone. Barry Gifford had one or two days of leave. He spent them with me, which I think was infinitely kind. Everyone else was away and busy with the War. There was no one I really knew well, no one related to me who could come and help me beat the torment out of me. My arms were covered with morphia needle marks, my face was a leaden grey from the effects of the drug.

I remember Simmie telling me when I was better that he was afraid of my becoming too used to the morphia, and my reply was that I could break myself of it in a day. He had a bet with me, a bet that I won easily. I would not allow them to give me another dose of it from that moment. Then there was

the torture of straightening out the foot that had been lying still in one position for so long. Simmie did his best with it, moving it a little every day, but even now it is a little crooked and occasionally I get a dull ache in my ankle. I had a lovely Irish nurse, an unhappy girl whose life was in a tangle from the War, and I remember so well one morning when I was almost convalescent the telephone ringing by my bed at 6 a.m. I answered it, and to my profound astonishment Sir John French's voice inquired how I was. "Can you walk yet?" he said. "Or can you be moved?" I replied that I could crawl, but was not yet able to walk.

"Would you like me to come round?" he inquired, and then he added in a worried voice as if talking to himself: "Perhaps I had better go round."

I could not imagine what had come over him. That he should even suggest coming round to see me at six in the morning was such a phenomenal event that I thought something terrible must have happened to him. I begged him to come later: "The matron won't like it," I said. "Please make it about eleven if you can." He put down the receiver and I thought I heard him sigh. About an hour later the German aeroplanes were over our heads and bombs were being dropped over London. I managed to crawl to the window to watch them. I am afraid I must reluctantly admit I had never seen a more impressive or perhaps even in its way a more wonderful sight. The formation was superb, and it was a lovely morning. It seemed impossible that they had come to mete out death. It was a triumphant challenge to our anti-aircraft guns. When the bombs began to fall and windows shook, and I saw the figures of men and women scurrying underground, the horror and terror of this happening dawned upon me. But, quite suddenly, I forgot to think even about that. The extraordinary conduct of my Irish nurse held me spellbound. She was kneeling in the middle of the floor, imploring and beseeching God to let it come to pass that one of the bombs should fall upon her head. She had entirely forgotten me. Her beautiful face was streaming with tears. "Let me die," she moaned. "Mary, Mother of Jesus, please let me die."

This girl lived to be happy and content, so I believe, but I

shall never forget that German daylight raid. Sir John French rang up when it was over and explained his conduct of the morning. "I knew it was coming," he said, "but I wasn't allowed to tell you. I thought you'd guess when I rang up at that hour what was wrong."

Guess. How could I have possibly imagined the Germans would be audacious enough to enter our skies in broad daylight.

Convalescence was tedious and tiresome, and I felt utterly miserable and weak. I saw a great deal of Doll's old friends and I received a very nice letter from the beautiful Jewish boy who was gradually becoming a famous artist. He was staying with Lady Ottoline Morrell, and wrote to me from the Manor House, Garsington, Oxford.

"THE MANOR HOUSE,
GARSINGTON,
OXFORD.

Sept. 16th, 1917.

MY DEAR RANEE,

Thank you for your letter. I am so glad you are not always happy!—an excellent sign. But really your letter was a nice one—so encouraging. You must write me more. I have been working hard—very hard—I have done three 'Still Lives' and one Landscape!

But Heavens! How feeble are the results in comparison to the immensity of our inner conceptions! I don't suppose I shall ever realize a hundredth part of what I feel. But perhaps it doesn't matter—God knows—it is good enough to feel them.

One has constantly to spend so much time grappling with difficulties and perverse circumstances. Sometimes it seems as if the whole world had united in one huge effort to extinguish that tiny little flame inside one. They blow and blow at it, and all our time is spent in sheltering it from the fury of this hurricane. But my deepest desire, really, is just to be left free enough, from outer calamities, to paint and paint, always to paint.

So we both passionately desire—you *Love* and I *to paint*. However, I admit that reciprocated love must indeed be

a fine thing, perhaps the most satisfactory of all emotions, but as I have never experienced it, have only in fact derived utter misery from loving, I turn away at last, in disgust, to devote myself wholly to work, which I find much more paying—I mean emotionally—as for physical passion ‘ordinaire,’ well, it is sometimes quite a nice sensation, but on the whole not worth the trouble, the time, or the energy. Also I find it nearly always really, rather, slightly, disgusting.

Well, write soon, my passionate ‘Eve.’

Yours always also passionate,

MARK GERTLER.”

Then trouble seemed to be heaped upon trouble. Vyner’s health caused him to leave Sarawak immediately on a trip to Ceylon, at the same time the Rajah was suddenly taken ill. The newspapers were filled with reports of our condition. I was ill, Vyner was ill, the Rajah was desperately ill. Press people rushed between the Hyde Park Hotel and my nursing home, demanding details. The doctors in Colombo reported unfavourably on Vyner’s health. He was suffering from dysentery and malaria, and they emphatically urged him to return home. In the meantime he received a letter from me telling him it would be useless for him to travel home, as the Rajah was dying. Vyner went up into the hills of Ceylon and after remaining there several weeks his health was completely restored, but the Rajah in the meantime was slowly sinking. It seemed that he would not, could not, die. But on May 17th, 1917, at Chesterton House, Cirencester, he passed peacefully away. The people of Sarawak would not believe that he was dead. To them he had been a gigantic institution, a religion. It was like the mighty crashing of a jungle tree, and then a quivering silence. Almost as if the whole country had drawn breath to ask these questions: “What will our new Rajah do with us?” Vyner, the enigma, the happy-go-lucky man with a laugh for everyone. How will he rule? What will be his policy. For the third generation will the Brooke policy be upheld?

An impressive memorial service to the late Rajah was held

at St. Paul's, at which His Majesty the King was represented. The service was conducted by Bishop Montgomery, D.D., The band of the Honourable Artillery Company played Chopin's Funeral March, and the Sarawak national anthem was played in its entirety and impressed everyone with its beauty.

Charles Brooke was buried in the wilds of Devonshire under the same yew tree as James Brooke, in the little churchyard of Sheepstor.

Vyner was proclaimed Rajah of Sarawak on Thursday, May 24th, 1917, seven days after his father's death. The proclamation was read from a platform specially raised on the steps of the Government offices. It was the very simplest ceremony. The people gathered together at the foot of the platform and many climbed into the trees that were nearby, looking in their coloured garments like immense blossoms amongst the foliage. Roped in upon the dais was a space for the Europeans and in the very centre sat Vyner, the new Rajah. Then, amidst an expectant hush, he rose to give his people his first public address as Rajah.

Vyner's delivery is excellent. You can hear him throughout a long building, and on this particular occasion his voice carried even to the outskirts of the crowd where the Chinese coolies were standing leaning on their rickshaws. Speaking in Malay, Vyner said to them these words:

"I make known to you Datus, Pangirans, Abangs, Inchis, Chiefs and all classes of people in Sarawak that I will on no account interfere with the Mohammedan faith or with any other religions or beliefs of the people. As the white Labu and the Kundor fruit show white when they are split, so, too, is my heart unblemished towards you. Gentlemen and Datus of the Council and Servants of the Government, do your duty to the best of your ability and show truth and justice in all your dealings. My people, rich and poor, never be afraid. If you are in trouble or have anything to complain of, I wish you all to tell me, so that I can help you. Therefore, never be afraid to come to me.

"I trust that you Gentlemen, Datus, Inchis, Pangirans, Chiefs, Towkays and all classes and nationalities will assist by

straightforwardness, justice and truth to maintain and strengthen the Government of this country."

The termination of this speech was the signal for the Royal salute and the playing of the Sarawak national anthem. Three cheers were then given for Vyner and the ceremony came to an end with a salute of twenty-one guns. Crackers exploded all over the "Kampongs" and Bazaar, as Vyner made his way back to the Astana. There was no doubt that May 24th, 1917, would be remembered for many a year by the hundreds of people who were fortunate enough to be present at the proclamation of Vyner Brooke, third Rajah of Sarawak.

Vyner despatched a message to the King at Buckingham Palace saying: "I have the honour to inform Your Majesty that I have been proclaimed Rajah by the people of Sarawak. I beg to assure Your Majesty of the unswerving loyalty and devotion to Your Majesty of myself and my people."

To which the King replied: "Cordial thanks for your loyal and friendly telegrams on your proclamation as Rajah. Congratulations and best wishes for the prosperity of yourself and Sarawak."

Vyner sent for Adeh to come out and assist him and take part in the administration of the country, and he appointed him a member of the Supreme Council.

In the meantime I had completely recovered, but there had been left in the trail of this illness of mine a delicacy in one lung and the doctors advised me to stop in South Africa for one month on my way to Sarawak via the Cape. After a series of misunderstandings and conflicting telegrams, I started on my way, expecting to meet Vyner when I landed at Cape Town.

It was difficult at that stage of the War for any woman to obtain a passage anywhere unless she were on active service, but owing to the kindness and courtesy of the Japanese Ambassador here in London I was permitted to travel on a Japanese transport, with no other women. Nothing but soldiers and sailors, officers and men.

I have never forgotten that trip, but the thing I remember about it most was Admiral Grant Dalton, and the remark he made when he was told that I was to sit next to him at

meals. He did not know that I was standing near, or that I could see the fury on his face and hear the anger in his voice.

"Sit next the Ranee of Sarawak?" he said. "Damned if I do. Put her somewhere else, anywhere excepting next to me."

I made a vow there and then that I would have my revenge. I felt miserable and alone, but, then, so did he. He had just parted from his wife whom he adored. But we could not keep up our warlike attitude for long, and it ended in his being one of the dearest friends that I have ever had.

I do not know what I would have done without Admiral Grant Dalton, or G. D. as I called him. He was goodness itself, I could not have had a wiser or more conscientious chaperon. Many of these soldiers and sailors were just like rude little boys, and G. D. and I felt like the Heads of some school. As we neared Cape Town and saw Table Bay enveloped in the morning sun, I was so thrilled at the thought of seeing Vyner I could hardly wait. We would have such fun, I thought, exploring South Africa together. A new experience, and a thrilling one.

We arrived. We landed. G. D. insisted on remaining with me until he had handed me over to Vyner. But there was no Vyner. He was not there. I was alone in Cape Town without a penny to my name.

G. D. took me to the Mount Nelson Hotel, but he could not remain with me. I do not think I had ever felt so helpless in my life. The Manager of the Mount Nelson was suspicious of my name. I felt hostile eyes looking me up and down. The hotel was full of pilots and pretty women. It seemed to me extremely gay. I cabled to Vyner in Sarawak, but a reply came from the Resident that Vyner had left Sarawak and his whereabouts were unknown. I had not a penny even to take a tram. In despair I wrote to the Governor, Lord Buxton, and asked him if he could help me. He did help me by guaranteeing my good name at the hotel, and later on he had me to stay at Government House, which was extremely kind of him.

There were three species of floors in the Mount Nelson Hotel at that time. The ground floor was respectable, the

second floor suspicious, and the third floor thoroughly bohemian. I was on the second floor, and no wonder, for there I was alone, with no money, and a name that hindered instead of helped. I must say they treated me very well, but I myself behaved like a fool. My only excuse was that I was utterly inexperienced. I knew very little about men, and those that I saw in Cape Town during my visit there were not ordinary men. They were creations of the War. It ended in my being thrown headlong on to a cactus bush and told I was the stupidest woman who had ever been their way.

Yet there were happy days surf bathing at Muizenburg and driving to Simon's Town and back. Lovely days walking in Adelaide Street and gazing at the exquisite shops. At last I received a cable from Vyner, who had gone to Hong Kong. He cabled me money and said he would meet me in Singapore. I left Cape Town without regret and with dark memories. Of all the interludes in my life South Africa has remained like a shadow in the sunshine. I felt like a little girl who had been to school for the first time and been given her first lesson. I think in a way it embittered me for the rest of my life and I have often felt that I would like to retrace the years, and push South Africa for ever out of the past.

Vyner met me in Singapore and we returned to Sarawak together. My health had completely recovered. It was impossible to remain ill in a climate so perfect as South Africa.

I was given a wonderful welcome and reception in Sarawak. The town and river were thronged with people. Innumerable native boats, "tongkans" and launches were all decorated with gaily coloured flags, and at night these boats were all illuminated so that the colour of them, reflected in the water, made a picture never to be forgotten. We went across river and were met by Mr. Tiang Swee, an eminent Touiki, who, with other leading members of the Chinese community, watched with us the march past of various lantern processions. The Chinese schoolboys also went by dressed in their cadet uniforms, each party halting as it came before me, and greeting me with a many versed song of welcome.

We then went a short way up and down river in a little

launch called the *Young Harry*, to see the illuminations, and another launch, filled to the brim with Inche Mohamed's band, followed us closely, playing shrilly and courageously throughout the evening. It was not until the early hours of the following morning that the last light burnt out. They could not have given me a better proof of their affection and loyalty than they did on my first visit to Sarawak after my illness. It made up for everything I had been through, and it took the bitter taste of Cape Town and of people I could not understand out of my mouth. So I sank once more into the warm arms of the East, and I knew that there was my anchorage, there in the country that I loved.

I think before I go any further I would like to describe a little more fully some of the people that I lived amongst and loved. I would like to draw some of them out of their setting and place them before you so that you can see them through my eyes.

The people of Sarawak fit into their country as softly and unobtrusively ■ the carefully shaded colours of a tapestry. They do not, so to speak, stand out from the canvas of palm trees and golden bamboos and little orchids. The colours they wear upon their pale brown nakedness blend with the crimson cannas and the flame of the forest petals as they fall. It is a simple country with the simplest happenings, therefore I am forced to take the little things and draw them into the daylight one by one. There are many extraordinary and interesting personalities in Sarawak, but I think it is amongst the Chinese that you can find humour and a quaint disregard of all convention.

There was a certain Chinese I knew by the name of Ah Chong, who had been converted by a Roman Catholic priest. Amongst the more orthodox conformities he was, of course, told that on no account whatever was he to eat meat on Fridays. Some little time after his conversion I went to see Ah Chong, who, having been re-christened into his new faith, was known by the name of Peter. It so happened that the day I went to visit him was a Friday, and as I approached the house the smell of roasting pork hung heavy in the air. I greeted Peter, who, urbane and smiling, asked me to be seated. The conversation was trivial enough, and all the time the fumes

of roasting pork were filling our nostrils. At last I could not bear it any longer.

"I hope, Peter," I said, "that you are doing everything the good priest told you?"

Peter nodded gently. "Oh yes, Rancee," he replied.

"Not eating meat on Friday, are you, Peter?" I inquired.

"Oh no, Rancee," replied Peter, looking shocked.

"To-day is Friday," I continued innocently. "Are you sure you are going to eat fish, Peter?"

Again the polite little smile, the dignified bow of the head.

"Oh yes, Rancee, I quite sure I no eat meat on Friday."

I looked him full in the face. I stared at him. Now the Chinese do not like being looked at in that way. Down came the full soft lids like pale shutters against the blackness of his eyes.

"There is a very nice smell of roasting pork," I commented, sniffing vigorously. "May I see your kitchen, Peter?"

He toddled contentedly into the kitchen, ushering me forward to see all that I could, and there, sure enough, was a juicy piece of pork frizzling in a pan.

"Oh, Peter," I said, "how can you be so wicked. Not only do you eat meat on Fridays, but you also tell lies."

Peter looked extremely distressed. "No, no, Rancee" he replied eagerly. "Me no tell lies. Me no eat meatie Flidays. The priest he catch me, my name Ah Chong. He splinkle little water over me, and my name not Ah Chong any more, my name Peter. I catch piecee pork, I splinkle little water and I say: 'Your name not piecee pork any longer, you name fish.' So, you see, me eatee fish on Flidays."

There are a hundred and one such tales of the Chinese, but they are not the people of Sarawak. They do not belong to the jungle, and the districts beyond the little town. The people of Sarawak are the Sea Dyaks, the Land Dyaks and the Kayans. It is they that have the legends and beliefs and superstitions, the wonderful handicrafts and carvings and art. The Sea Dyaks are the simplest people in the world, perfect in stature, like slim, bronze gods. Their dances are the perfection of art. Their women are small and timid until they know you and then they cluster round like

inquisitive children, examining everything you have on. They live in long houses, instead of villages, and to climb up ■ bamboo pole into one of these houses is a work of art. One old Dyak had always thought Vyner was so great a man that he sat side by side with God. He used to ask him what God was like, and how many doors to his house he had and whether he paid any taxes.

There would not be time or space to go into all the myths and magics and traditions of these perfect people, but I would like to dwell a little upon these head hunting tribes and try to explain why these things were done, and the origin of the well-called "Savage" practice. I myself have been into a fort where a hundred heads lay waiting to be reclaimed by their relations after the Sarawak Government had successfully "put down" head hunting as a pastime of the Dyak daily life. The amazing part of it was that these Dyaks could recognize the heads of their aunts and uncles and kith and kin from the smoked and blackened skulls that lay in that fort, and they would point to a head that lay buried beneath ten or twenty others and say: "That one belonged to my father . . ." or "This one was my brother." The Dyaks were at one time, ■ you know, the fiercest head hunters, and it surely stands to the credit of the administration of these three generations of Brookes that they have been able to handle these turbulent people, and by a slow process of education which had as its basis a strict regard for the native customs brought them to a state of realization and understanding, and made them feel a little of the horror of an ancient and violent custom to which they had been addicted for so long. I have said that this custom has been put down to a very large extent, but there are still, and always will be, I suppose, a few remote cases of savageness and crime. You cannot stamp out blood traditions of centuries in three generations of rule.

When a young Dyak came of age, no matter of how elegant appearance he might be, the beautiful girls of his tribe thought little of his manliness unless he had at least two or three heads showing to his credit.

The custom of such a Dyak was to visit neighbouring houses at night and there repair to the "sadow," ■ segregated part where all the young and attractive girls would be waiting for



THE ASTANA FROM THE AIR

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ANCIENT TROPHIES HANGING IN BARAK FORT

Photographs taken by the Rajah.



KOHU A DYAK CHIEF CARRYING HEAD TROPHIES

Photograph taken by W. T. Dick.

their lovers. The young man, after singing a few love songs, would proceed to ask the favours of some girl, and she, perhaps attracted, would receive his attentions kindly. But always there would come the question: "How many heads hast thou taken?" And if he was unable to recount his experiences of head hunting and present her with at least one smoked head, she would turn upon him and address him thus:

"Coward—do not dare to sue my favours unless with a dried head for me to nurse when thou art absent from me, that I may be constantly reminded of thy prowess."

And so this boy would go head hunting because it was the only means of winning her love, or else he would go and consult a "manang" or witch doctor, as to the best way to set forth on this expedition. The witch doctor would inform him of even greater reasons why he should take heads. "If thou desirest to live in Paradise," he would say, "then, in this world thou shalt take heads. For every male head thou takest, thou shalt surely have one male slave in Paradise to work for thee. For every female head that thou takest, thou shalt surely have one glorious concubine in Paradise." The "manang" would also explain that a child's head would be of the same value as the head of a full grown man or woman, even if it be taken from its mother's womb.

The young Dyak would collect together companions of his own age and one or two of greater experience, and repair to the jungle to construct a war canoe. Some fine old trees would be selected, cut down, and hollowed out. Then, when the canoe was ready, he would prepare himself for war. A head-dress of feathers soaked in the blood of a fowl, a short sword sharpened on the skull of some enemy taken in battle by his ancestors, and a grotesque shield covered with tufts of human hair and amulets of hair and bone to ward off the evil spirits.

And so equipped he would start in his canoe. It would be paddled for a day and then tied up alongside the bank where the eldest of the warriors would listen for the "chirping" of a lucky omened bird. If the shrill cry of the "Jampong" bird could be heard on the right of their camp, then it was time to proceed, and great was the joy of the warriors ■ they embarked and paddled swiftly away. Sometimes a month

would pass before the proper omen bird was heard. They could not and would not go on any warpath against the wishes of the birds who governed all such expeditions. At last the end of the journey would be sighted, and they could see the enemy working in their rice fields. The warriors, armed to the teeth, would swoop down upon them, and seizing them by the hair, cut off their heads with several strokes, men, women, and even little children. Now I wonder if any of you who may read this book will realise how strong a man it takes to sever the head from a body with but a single blow. Only on one occasion was it related that this feat was accomplished, and the story is told and retold by the Dyaks to this day, and his name repeated from generation to generation. On this particular occasion there was no special deed of valour, the rice farmers were unarmed, and there were many children. It did not take long, this massacre, and with yells of exultation, these warriors held the heads on high by their long hair. The bodies were not touched. Anyone daring so to do would become an outcast from his tribe for ever.

They then returned to within one day's distance of their home, landed, and sent a messenger to inform the tribe of their return. I dare not now relate how these heads were prepared for smoking and preserving, but let it suffice that these Dyaks have their own methods of removing the eyes, and tongue, and brains from a human head. Then a great fire would be kindled beneath a tree and covered with damp leaves, so as to cause a mighty smoke. The heads would be suspended from a branch and thoroughly smoked until the features were blackened and pickled, yet, strangely enough, still recognizable.

Great preparations would be made for the feast of the dried heads. Messengers with invitations to all men, women, and children would be sent out far and wide. Every person contributed his quota of rice, sugar cane, fruits, fish, wild pig, and last but by no means least, an intoxicating drink called "Tuak" or rice beer. It would be what we in London call a "bottle party" of the greatest magnitude.

The young girls would be dressed in gala costume. This consisted of brass corsets, short skirts and long coats of beads. Each girl would grip one of the warriors by the neck with her

left hand, and casting a look of adoration into his eyes, pour the rice beer down his throat from a cup in her right hand. The witch-doctors, or "manangs", would swing a black fowl over the heads of the warriors and mutter a prayer in some ancient language that had been handed down from generation to generation, even to this day, the meaning of which has for a long time been forgotten. The heads would then be relegated to the main veranda of the house when, with great veneration, they would be suspended from a beam. The Dyak boy would no longer see disfavour in the eyes of his beloved. He had taken a head and it was the fulfilment of his manhood.

So you can see by this what a delicate task it has been to teach these people that to take your old aunt's head, who may be peacefully farming in a rice field, was not a sign of manliness or courage or of honour. It has not been an easy thing to meddle with tradition, or for a European to get inside a Dyak's skin. Suppress these head hunters, deny them their traditions, and tread carelessly on their beliefs, and who can tell what the result would then have been. The three Brookes have trodden a dangerous and shadowed path, but owing to their great understanding they have emerged into the sun.

I have mentioned throughout this narrative, the "manangs" or witch doctors, and I feel I should explain that they have had and do sometimes still have quite a following in Sarawak with their oracle of medicine, their occult practices and enchantments and clever incantations. I have seen a woman whose life has been despaired of made whole and well again by him ; by the laying on of hands, and clamorous invocation, and immense consumption of gin, the patient has been cured. There seemed to be an art in this laying on of hands. The sick man or woman would be stretched upon the ground and kneaded with great vigour. He would be rolled upon, and songs were chanted in his ear, and prayers were muttered as an accompaniment to each blow upon his flesh. Then the patient would rise, a little delicately at first, as if he were afraid that he might break.

The witch doctor would walk away, beneath his arm the empty gin bottle. But no, not altogether empty, for he would declare with a wink that the cast out devils were safely corked

within it. It was merely a question of faith, and I rather envied them being able to believe as they poured gin down their throats, that any devil they might possess was leaving them and entering the bottle as they emptied it.

There is one other race that has to be pen pictured, and that is the Malay, those perfect and graceful people to whom the country mostly belongs. There is one Malay in particular I have in mind at this moment who died about ten years ago. His name was Inchi Mohamed Ali, and in those early days he was Vyner's head clerk and looked after the Astana affairs. He could speak English and he had the greatest sense of humour I have ever known in a Malay. He asked me once to write his life story, and he sent me a diary he had kept for years. "I herewith enclose the extension of my story," he said, "and trust that your Highness will agree with my method of arranging it. If, however, there should appear any error, I sincerely trust that your Highness will arrange it in a style to suit the sense."

His story was a mixture of childish wisdom expressed in the quaintest of language. "When we pray," he wrote in one chapter, "we are not allowed to make use of other languages besides the Arabic. We know very little of the meaning of what we are saying in our prayers."

As a little boy he had been educated at St. Thomas's School, and been under a Dyak teacher who, so he told me, was an exceedingly fierce man. "He used to knock our foreheads," he said with a rueful smile, "which we felt very painful and swelling. He kicked us with his shoes on our shin bones, which made us to sit down."

Inchi Ali's dream was to be the leader of a band. He bought some small whistles, and made a number of bamboo flutes, and he then gathered together some small boys to blow the flutes and whistles and to beat a drum. There was no music in it, even he admitted that. "It is mere noise," he would say with his broad, sly smile, "which angers the people of the village."

Inchi Ali thought it would be easy for him to play on any instrument. "To begin with I try the cornet," he explained to me, "but if my mouth blow, my fingers will stop, and if my fingers work, my eyes cannot see the paper."

Besides being head clerk at the Astana, Inchi Ali eventually became the leader of a small and energetic band which was much in demand at Malay weddings, ceremonies and feasts, and we used to hear its shrill, discordant strains issuing from some distant Kampong. Inchi Ali thought playing "loud" meant playing "good", and he had no mercy on his palpitating and exhausted bandsmen.

I have dwelled upon this Malay character because it seemed to me to step out of the soft canvas of this race, and stand before me in its coloured quaintness. He was what in England would have been called a "card". Round-faced and gentle, he had the appearance of a coffee-tinted "Haldane". He was the outstanding personality of his time. A charming rogue was Inchi Ali, and he gloried in his artfulness like a lawless little boy will hug himself with glee over his guilt.

On Monday, July 22nd, 1918, Vyner took the Oath of Accession before the Council Negri, and was publicly installed as Rajah. I think this is the day that has remained and will remain always longest in my memory.

Early in the morning the river opposite had become transformed. A crimson banner spanned the road at the stone landing-place, supported by two tall masts covered by heraldic shields and little miniature flags. There was a long triumphal archway of these masts, hanging with garlands of coloured paper roses, and reaching as far as the doorway of the Court House.

At an early hour detachments from the Sarawak Rangers and Police arrived upon the scene and took up their appointed stations upon the route.

At nine o'clock we issued from the Astana, followed by the Tuan Muda bearing the Sword of State upon a yellow cushion, and we were taken across river by the State barge that had been originally a gift from the late King of Siam. We were received at the stone landing place by the members of the Supreme Council, and when we reached the topmost step the band pealed forth the Sarawak National Anthem. We went slowly

forward, the Rajah a little in advance of me, and sheltered by his official royal umbrella. The members of the Supreme Council fell into line behind us with the Tuan Muda and all the native members. I remember so well how slowly we had to walk that sunlit path owing to the great age and failing strength of the Datu Bandar.

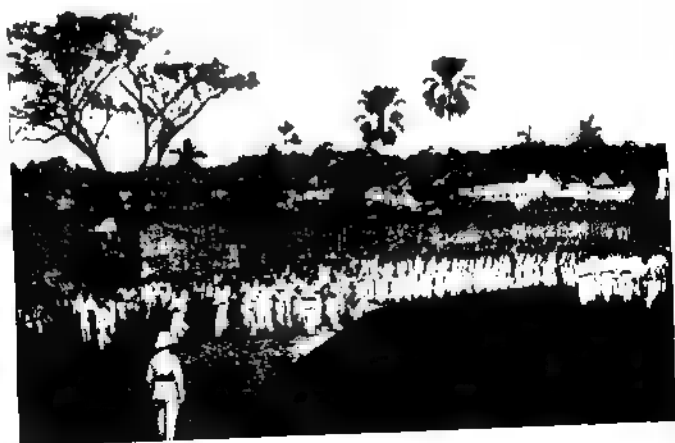
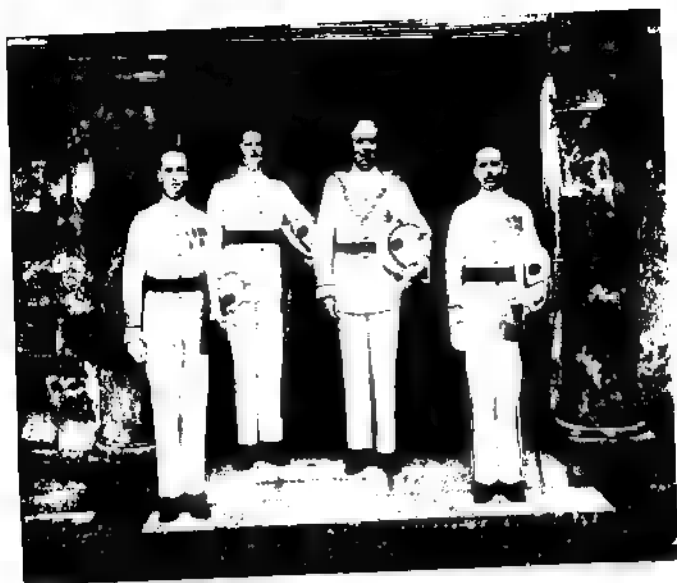
The interior of the Court House was like Cinderella's rags, completely turned into magnificence; whereas on ordinary days it tried its cases and sat in solemn judgment, it presented now the carefree appearance of a fairy palace. The walls and joists blazed with varied flags and emblems and the narrow twisted pathway was carpeted with crimson cloth. From the entrance to the dais it was lined on either side by Dyak warriors, shoulder to shoulder, their naked bodies as motionless as images in bronze. Above the dais was a golden canopy, and upon it two large decorated chairs. As we took our seats the full beauty of this scene caught in one's throat. Out of the dim lighting of the Court House the gorgeous native dresses, the uniforms and the white feathers of the Dyaks stood out, revealing here a Malay Chief, here some Haji fresh from Mecca, a Dyak chief with a mighty spear between his hands, and far at the back some Chinese with paper flowers in their buttonholes.

Vyner wore his green and gold uniform. Adeh was in khaki. The Europeans of the Supreme Council wore the full dress Sarawak Service uniform of white duck, and crimson and gold gorgets. I think amongst all that throng it was the Dyaks who seemed to stand out. It may, of course, only have been because we so seldom saw them in Kuching, or it may have been because I had never before realised the beauty of their colour and form, their waving plumes of war, their barbaric shields covered by tufts of hair, and the tiger cats' teeth glistening in their ears. All these things absorbed and attracted my attention. I did not miss a single detail. I could see how perfect the many-coloured beads looked round their necks, and the blue of the tattooing on their naked bodies. Their limbs hung with ornaments and bracelets, and the sound of these as they moved was like a little tinkle of music through the silent Court House.

We crossed the platform on which were assembled the



THE
KORR



(Above) COUNCIL NEGRI DAY
(Below) SARAWAK RANGERS

members of the Council Negri, the Sarawak Government officers and their wives, and all the European guests and we took our seats upon the dais. As soon as we were seated, Inchi Abu Bakar proceeded to read aloud the proclamation announcing the accession of Charles Vyner Brooke, and expounding the meaning of the ceremony that was about to follow. When this was over the aged Datu Bandar advanced timidly to the dais, and in an amazingly strong voice dedicated the Sword of State, which is the symbol of the Raj, to the keeping of the Rajah, in the name of the people of the country. Datu Bandar then received the sword from the Datu Tomong-gong who had held it while the dedication was being read, and, mounting the lower step of the dais, stretched forth his arms, across which the golden cushion bearing the sword was laid. Vyner rose to his feet, and laying his hand upon the sword announced in a few ringing words his acceptance of the charge. The Datus retired backwards for a few steps, the Datu Bandar placing the sword on a pedestal in front of the dais so that all might see it. Then, joining his hands before his face he pronounced the "Somlah" or fealty with his head bowed down, and all his fellow-countrymen throughout the building followed him in gesture and in utterance so that it became like a soft chant over the crowd. As soon as this died down there came a mighty European cheer, and after the cheer the Dyaks raised their spears and gave one long triumphant war cry that echoed as far as the multitude outside, and was caught up and continued throughout the little streets. In the midst of a veritable turmoil the two venerable figures of the Datu Bandar and the Tomonggong retired with gentle dignity to their places. Their part in the ceremony was at an end. Vyner then descended from the dais, and took the oath of accession in Malay. Three of the Europeans were sworn in as new members of the Council, and then the whole was brought to a close by the playing of the Sarawak anthem and a thundering salute from the fort guns. Vyner Brooke, third Rajah of Sarawak, was installed.

And what of Vyner himself? How did this shy recluse feel on being dragged into the open and forced to face a ceremony of this kind? Nobody who saw him installed that day could possibly have realized what Adeh and I went through

before he started. Vyner before a ceremony is hardly a human being, and it is only by constant encouragement and a stiff whisky and soda that he can be brought into action. From the time that he wakes in the morning until the ceremony is over he has to be closely observed, otherwise he is quite capable of making himself ill rather than face the ordeal. On this particular occasion I do not think he was conscious of any of us. We swarmed round him like ants, dressing him, instructing him, and pleading with him. We found the moths had got at his uniform, and as he thrust his way into the coat the sleeves began to fall out. He was tacked and pinned and eventually perfectly turned out, but Adeh and I were perspiring and exhausted wrecks.

Very soon after this we went for a trip up north, Adeh, Vyner and I, and there we saw things that have lingered always in my memory. We went to Baram, and from there to a lovely long-house, and we saw dancing and listened to amazing incantations. Then we went on to Miri and inspected the oil fields, and watched the great pumps sucking it out of the land. It was a long trip, but it gave me a wonderful impression of the country and of the people that lived in it. I saw a variety of tribes, and their customs and their way of living enthralled me. They were all devoted to Vyner, and crowded round him patting and stroking his arms.

There was one other ceremony I went to, and it left a strange impression upon me. I have seen many religions on my travels. I have been into temples, and I have been present at the reading of the Koran. I have sat upon the ground and watched the Seiks beating their drums and losing their identity in the ecstasy of their music to their gods. I have crept barefooted to the women's quarter in the mosque and squatting amongst them, unconsciously swayed my body to their mysterious chant. I have seen the Tamils in an orgy of delight carry their gods throughout the streets of the Bazaar. But of all the most costly and wondrous ceremonies I have witnessed there is none, to my mind, that has such a rare display as the Chinese Wankang, or chasing out of devils. This festival is of Hokein origin, and in China I believe it is only observed in certain parts of the Fukein province. Every ten years, wherever there is a community of

Chinese, this procession and festival takes place, and it so happened that I was in Sarawak when the allotted time for it came to pass, and I was a witness in that brilliant crowd, and saw things more legendary than real that made one wonder at the imaginative power of this strange religion, that drove these shrewd and subtle people into a belief that no amount of teaching could allay. The procession consisted of banners of all colours and all sizes, decorated canopies, bands of musicians, and long files of fantastically dressed youths, seated upon all kinds of artificial animals; triumphal cars loaded with paper flowers, and stages upon which rode fair and bejewelled "maidens," who were really boys dressed up to represent girls. These boy-girls poised for hours in graceful positions denoting some character in Chinese history, and ever and anon water was raised to them on poles to moisten their parched lips.

A huge paper dragon with crimson jaws wide open, wound its tortuous way through the procession, persistently snapping at an immense and tantalizing golden orb that eluded its ferocious teeth. Each object in the long procession had its own legendary significance but I, as a stranger, understood but little.

I managed to ascertain that the essential parts of this strange ceremony were the Chai-lians and the mystic Junk. The Chai-lians bore with them purple banners. Their standard-bearer was the tallest and most muscular Chinaman I had ever seen, and on either side of him walked his assistants, beating drums. In the midst of this were the Chai-lians themselves. They were composed of beautiful Chinese boys between the ages of ten and eighteen. They were dressed in richly embroidered tunics and purple trousers. Their headdress was strangely and profusely decorated and made to taper in a forward curve after the fashion of our Punchinello. Almost all the boys carried a short paddle and as they marched along in single file they sang some kind of incantation invoking the "Great One" to bring peace and plenty upon the devout people of Sarawak. The faces of the boys were highly coloured, and they were beautiful in their impassive, Oriental way. Their full lips were painted a vivid scarlet like little Canna petals, and perfectly arched eyebrows encircled their narrow eyes

like crescent moons. So still and quiet was their expression they might have been toy images; it was almost impossible to believe that they were real.

Now the word Chai-lian means to pick or pluck a lotus flower, and it was at one time applied to the girls who rowed some rich lord of ancient China round the tranquil lotus pond. The fact that they now signify these yellow-robed youths is only an inconsistency of the many inconsistent things in the different stages of this long procession. When the procession rounded a corner or passed a temple, a pause was made while the standard-bearer circled the holy banner twice overhead. This was supposed to produce the effect of luring all evil spirits that might be hovering about in that vicinity, until the Mystic Junk, which was dragged along on its four wheels, appeared.

In the Junk there was almost every article that the entrapped "Hantus" or spirits were likely to require on their long journey to the land of exile, from a pin to a human creature. Attracted by the magnetism of the waving banner, these roving spirits were tempted to enter the Junk. Once there the magic spell seized them and prevented them leaving. So they remained in the Junk until it was burnt . . . burnt with all its valuables on board. The entire cost of building this Junk was four hundred and fifty dollars, the cargo, two large bags of rice, a thousand small bundles of firewood, five hundred small jars containing salt and sugar, various vegetables, etc., one live pig, two fowls (one cooked and the other alive), one duck, and all sorts of foodstuffs and salt fish; three sets of religious weapons from the temple, eight wooden cannons, one small brass cannon, thirty-four large and small silk flags, five silk umbrellas, three big royal fans, nine red silk cloths, seven lamps, fourteen round "rotan" shields, a cooking set consisting of knives, forks and pans, one complete set of carpenter's tools, three small model bedsteads of wood, together with pillows and mosquito nets for the three cabins on board, three paper sedan chairs with their paper coolie carriers, four paper horses with their grooms, the paper captain and his crew of sailors and three wooden anchors, ropes and tackle all complete.

The Junk was followed by two small boats, and in each of

these small boats sat a little lotus gatherer. Then came the idols, placed in a sort of sedan chair borne by four people. These idols were the "Ong-yahs," and as I gazed at these amazing idols with their gorgeous colouring and twisted painted faces, I realized the strength of the Chinese faith, and their belief in their legends, as deep, if not deeper, than our own belief is in the Bible.

The Wankang proceeded to the selected spot for the burning of the Junk, followed by hundreds of spectators, and as they moved, they did not walk or run, but swayed in an uncanny kind of dance, accompanied by a melancholy and weird incantation, and by the beating of gongs and drums. Six bullock carts and many rickshaws followed, loaded to the brim with fuel for the ignition of the Junk, and as the Junk itself approached, the crowds lining the sides of the road fell down upon their knees, and with joss sticks in their hands offered obeisance to this majestic monster. It was indeed a masterpiece of labour. I could hardly believe that the angry and vivid figureheads that sat in the bow and the stern were really only made of paper. Their expressions were so alive and so grotesquely real, with their puckered brows and foreheads adorned with rows of imitation pearls. Enormous white tusks protruded from the corners of their mouths, with blood red gums and long gold tentacles. Fantastic lanterns were slung on board and over the sides, and along the bulwarks stood rows of little paper men hand in hand, in the blue and white uniform of seamen. Above them were flags of every colour. It took some time to adjust the three masts and sails, but when completed I had seldom seen anything more perfect. The tall masts and white sails like quivering, ghostly wings, the many thousands of flags, and the illuminated hull. The joss papers, torches and little lanterns were like eyes piercing through the crowds. We stood round in a massive circle watching the fuel being placed beneath the Junk. Then, at a given signal, everyone in that silent company hurled their lighted joss-sticks against the looming ship . . . and then they stood spellbound and silent once more, watching the sparks turn into a blaze and the blaze into a high and roaring flame. All through those many minutes that the great Junk took to burn, and as its magnificence turned into a mass

of embers and then fell, amongst those many hundred people, not one single world was said.

It is difficult to describe and well-nigh impossible to convey how one's heart stood still as the great Junk fell to pieces, and how, when the last little flag was crumpled by the flames and the whole thing lay in a black heap on the ground, ■ sigh went through the company of people like the rustling of many wings . . . as if the devils had started on their flight.

I was in it, but not of it. And all the time I had an extraordinary feeling that it was I who lacked something that civilization and teaching could not give me, and that there, behind those yellow masks of faces, there was a wisdom more profound and eloquent than the very finest sermon in the world.

In the meantime I was busy writing, and I had several successful ventures that culminated in my winning one hundred pounds for an essay on a film. I could not believe the telegram I received—I did not think it possible. One hundred pounds seemed to me a fortune beyond the dreams of a mere mortal. It was the George Clark productions who offered the prize, but the film was called "The Bigamist." Not a very good film, but interesting, and I remember in my criticism saying that it was far too grey in tone. Leonora, aged ten, was handed the cheque one evening on the stage of the Alhambra by Miss Ivy Duke, who was the smartest and most beautiful film star at that time. Not only was I proud of the money, but I was thrilled that out of several hundred essays, mine had won its way.

I finished my book called *Toys* and I took the manuscript home with me. I made up my mind I would publish this work of mine privately and see if I could make more of it and out of it in that way. I then typewrote ■ thousand notices describing and telling a little of its contents. These notices I pushed through the doors of people's houses at night. I took three or four streets at a time, and my heart was thumping against my ribs ■ I thrust the papers into the letter-boxes,

rang the bell, and ran into the shadows until all danger was passed. But my efforts were all in vain. The book did not sell, and it was not until it was openly published that the critics again came to my assistance. They said that the influence of the East was strong in this powerful, eerie, haunting, morbid novel—the theme running through its passionate, vivid pages was the Eastern belief of the transmigration of souls. It was a curious, original and fascinating book, but withal rather terrible.

But the people who were kind enough to purchase my book and read it, assured me that they liked it enormously. Lord Haldane wrote to me from Cloan, Auchterarder, Perthshire, the following flattering letter:

"DEAR RANEE,

I took up your book to look through in the ordinary way but I could not lay it down. I think it is a remarkable piece of work, which shows great artistic power. Constructive imagination is combined in it with the touch of realism. . . . I am taking my copies to London in order to show them to one or two people who understand these things.

Meantime I congratulate you,

Yours truly,

HALDANE."

I also received the most charming letter from Algernon Blackwood, whom I had met several times at Henry Ainley's house in Kent.

"MY DEAR RANEE (he said),

I couldn't write sooner because I had not finished *Toys*. I finished it last night and I do not think it fails, for it seems to me a consistent study of rebirth logically carried out, and in places really wonderful. The people are alive and real, and the soul of the woman slipping from body to body, is very true and haunting. The way you show her soul in different settings, growing, struggling, yet always the same type *au fond*, is excellent; so are her reactions to the various men. Ujito is most vivid, and her return to that jungle bungalow helps the reader and tends to make the idea convincing and coherent. Only one detail puzzled

me: when she is reborn into Elissa, who, what soul, occupies Susannah's body?

I think one reason you failed to make it epic is, perhaps, a certain diffuseness which tends, in many places, to divert attention from the central figure—her soul. The story wants cutting remorsefully—the mind of the reader wanders here and there and power is wasted. I know you must develop your other characters, yet they should be developed always with an eye—the reader's eye—on *her soul* as the dominating, central controlling thread of interest. It is enough, I mean, to mention here and there that Sudarah and Serini are peering over Susannah's shoulder or peeping up thro' her mind in vague memories—it has to be shown, not merely mentioned. This struck me.

But the real difficulty, I think, is that the subject of rebirth, if it is to grip and move and convince the reader, must be treated in an immense sort of way. It is immense both in meaning and perspective. The spirit of the Eternities must be your background. Pretty pretty is the wrong setting; it should be epic, not lyrical. It's an exacting theme, as I found in *Julius Le Vannon* and *The Wave*, where I, too, invited failure. *Toys* would be better as a long short story, impressionist, condensed, with only just enough detail for atmosphere. This is my honest opinion, but the book remains for me the best and most sincere treatment of rebirth I know. I should like to come and talk it over with you when I come to town, if I may let you know. I come up rarely, but will take my chance.

Yours sincerely,

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD."

I was a little elated by these letters but my mind was not really settled. I began to try my hand at other things, and I took up drawing and painting and pastels—these pastels I afterwards exhibited and I sold a considerable number. My "Show" was at the Walker Galleries in Bond Street, and again I had wonderful press notices. Indeed all my life the Press have been exceptionally kind to me, and any conceit I may have I put the blame down at their door. "Those who missed the recent little exhibition at the Walker Galleries of H.H.

the Ranee of Sarawak's lovely pastels of scenes and native types in Sarawak," they said, "really missed a great treat. The marvellous colouring, the crimson and gold of the sunset, the vivid beauty of the tropical flowers, the silvery glory of the moonlight across the still river, the quaint, picturesque native huts, and the green depths of the palm groves must be seen to be believed, and the Ranee, through the luminous medium of pastel, has managed to convey to those that dwell in this chill Northern clime, some of the atmosphere and colour of the gorgeous East."

I balanced between literature and art. Altho' I had never had a single lesson in drawing since I was a child, I was able to do portraits of almost every tribe in Sarawak. With pastels between my fingers I seemed to be able to form a picture, and when it was done, it seemed almost as if it had been created in a dream. I did not know which I preferred, writing or drawing. I tried to paint portraits of the children. I absorbed myself in writing about them and painting them. My whole life was altered; I could not escape from this maternal bond. Always I had wanted children, they seemed to me to be the fulfilment of a woman's life. My ambition fell from me, and I worked at intervals, not caring how good my work was, or how bad. I went out everywhere, meeting new friends, and searching out old ones. I felt ill—terribly ill. I suffered agonies of pain inside. I thought to myself, this is cancer, I feel sure that it is cancer—I was terrified, and I hid my pain. I would not consult any doctor. "It will not help," I kept saying to myself, "knowing what my illness is, I would rather never know." And I went out dancing and tried to forget, but the awful pain was still there.

I wrote to Sir John French a long letter of sympathy for all that had taken place during the war. He was grateful, and replied at once to my letter.

"MY DEAR, DEAR SYLVIA,

Only a line just to thank you with all, *all* my heart for your dear, kind, helpful sympathy.

We shall meet in a few days I earnestly hope.

Always aff.,

J. F."

Two months later he was taken seriously ill, and I, not knowing this, wrote to him many letters that were never answered. I thought I had annoyed him in some way and I again put pen to paper—this time he answered, but wearily as if he was still very far from well. He wrote from the Vice Regal Lodge, Dublin.

"MY DEAR SYLVIA,

How could I be cross with you!!! No dear, when did you write? It must have been when I was very ill. I know I didn't get a lot of letters that came for me then.

I'm back home now and quite well again! Your letter was forwarded to me here after considerable delay. Write me a *longer* letter and tell me *all* your news and plans.

Yours always,

F.

Why don't you come over and see me? It's a pretty country and you won't be shot."

Of course I could not go to Ireland, but I saw him when he returned, and he was very much saddened and more serious than before. Occasionally there was a twinkle in the blue eyes but it did not last. He spoke bitterly about my father and Douglas Haig. He would never forget, he said, the day that he gave up his command. Facing all those troops and feeling that they knew he was leaving them had been an ordeal he hoped he would never have to endure again. He had done his best, he repeated again that he had done his best—but he had been entangled in intrigues, and stifled by red tape.

We had moved from Tilney House, Wimbledon, to 8 Airlie Gardens, Campden Hill. It was a lovely house with large, open rooms that looked out into the gardens. We were very happy there, and the children went to a little day school in Notting Hill. We lived quietly and unobtrusively, and we very seldom went out. Our lives balanced between East and West. We kept moving from house to house when we were home. In the twenty-five years we have been married we have had fifteen houses, and three flats and two garages. Not a bad record really, when I think back on them all and

see them lined up against the background of our life. And in all of them I was happy. Never a shadow crossed our doors. The children made the houses, and the houses became wonderful because of them. When we were in Airlie Gardens we took to roller skating and Vyner and I would go to the Holland Park rink and be dragged round and round by eager instructors. We took the children at first, but Elizabeth's skate kept falling off, and she would cry, and implore us to take her home, so we were obliged to abandon their lessons and send them home. Vyner and I would practise our roller skating in the drawing-room, and I shall never forget the day two extremely respectable and dignified neighbours came to call. The doors were flung open and the parlour maid announced my guests, but to their utter amazement, a man's figure shot towards them with a crimson face and startled eyes—they could not see that he was on roller skates, and all they heard was a curious scraping sound, and a man's figure, in shirt sleeves, and an enormous posterior flashed by them and round the corner and away. This was Vyner, with a cushion forced into his trousers in case he should fall, and his face pouring with sweat, having his daily round on the drawing-room parquet floor. Nobody ever called on us again, I think the rumour spread that my husband was a little bit eccentric. "So peculiar, my dear," I felt sure they were all saying, "a roller-skating Rajah—and such a peculiar shape."

We also took up dancing—Vyner and I made up our minds that we would learn all the modern steps. We went to the Empress rooms and we inspected the dancing instructors and instructresses who gave daily lessons and danced there in the evenings. It is strange how fate leads one by the hand, and turns one's footsteps round some corner into an entirely new world. Fate certainly stood by us as we watched the dancing lessons, and we made up our minds who we wanted to teach us the new steps—there seemed to be two outstanding figures—a tall, slim girl with rather a wistful face and attractive eyes, and a funny crooked smile—and a man who danced divinely. The name of the man was Mr. Silvester and the girl was Toby Johns. When Vyner saw that strange, pale face leaning over the shoulder of some man she was instructing, he made up his mind that he would have her and no one else to

teach him how to dance, and I, little knowing it then, selected Mr. Silvester, who, a little while afterwards won the dancing championship of the world.

Vyner asked me if I would make all the arrangements, he was too shy, so he said, to ask Miss Johns himself. We learned how to dance, but we learned even more than that. We had found a friend in that long, lean girl that has lasted us all these years, and Toby Johns is one of those rare and wonderful women who has never let any of us down. We have had many friends, but no greater one than she, and the memory of her and the thought of her has always brought warmth into my heart. Our dancing led us into strange places. We went out almost every night. It took us abroad even and we danced in the Bois in Paris. The Grafton Galleries, Chez Victors, the Berkeley, Ciro's. We tried everywhere, it seemed that Vyner could never be exhausted. Poor Toby was dragged hither and thither bewildered and dazed by our terrific energy—then, quite suddenly, Vyner became bored. That is his way with things. He goes at a mania so fiercely that it is bound to pass. I went home one day and I found the drawing-room hung with wreaths, and messenger boys arriving with more. To each wreath a ticket was pinned, and when I looked I saw it was his night club membership cards. On a placard he had written "Farewell to Night Life in London." It was the burial of his dancing days, and only Vyner would have ended them in this amusing and amazing way.

Every year we went out to Sarawak, and each year it had grown a little in stature. Bungalows were re-built and a new settlement started at the back of the Astana. Our Government officers married, and there were children and pretty women and smart frocks. A new club house was designed, a mixed club this time, but arranged in such a way that none of the men were forced into the presence of women. Kuching and Miri became rivals in fashion. We in Kuching considered ourselves less modern perhaps but more exclusive than those in Miri. It was always amusing during race week to see the

competition in clothes. All the men and the women were loyal to their own station, and I think it is this keen desire in them that makes their work and their endeavours so remarkable. They very rarely give way to the heat and the loneliness, but keep up a standard miles away from their fellow-men that is really beyond praise.

In England we went on changing houses. We even returned for a while to Orchard Lea, and I re-trod the paths of childhood. But it was a failure. Perhaps because the shadow of that morbid and unnatural little girl was ever at my elbow, the grass seemed less green, and the long paths much shorter, even the Rabbit Stone had lost its charm. We did not stay there long, but returned to London and we blossomed forth in a regal-looking house in Portland Place. It was here that I began to entertain, but only when Vyner was abroad. I went in for Bohemian parties, and I gave a Chinese supper, when we all squatted on the floor and ate Chinese food with chop sticks. I must admit that these parties were enormously decorated by the presence of Max Darewski—the Max I had remembered as a little boy. He was so charming and good-natured. He never minded how many hours he played the piano. And how beautifully he played! I do not think I have ever heard a more brilliant and easy pianist than he was. His fingers rippled over the keys, and he would laugh and talk while he was playing. I became very fond of Max, he had charming qualities, and he was always very kind to me.

I made one real friend while I was at Portland Place, and this was Jack Dare. Jack had all the beauty and charm of his sisters. I think I can quite safely say that he was one of the personalities of his day. He went everywhere, and no party or club seemed complete without him. His sense of humour was of the most fascinating kind, and he could keep a whole room full of people alive. Unfortunately he was not very strong, and constant worry, and the fact that his various enterprises compelled him to be always amongst people day and night, eventually wore him out. The beautiful, animated boy I remembered first, became an ill and tired man, until at last he was obliged to retire and live in wide and open spaces where the air was strong, in order to safeguard his

lungs. Everyone misses Jack, and no one has quite filled his place.

Very soon after Vyner had returned from the East and we were living in a lovely little farm-house we had bought from Jack, called Bridgeham Farm, near Dorking, I was taken desperately ill. The pain that I had been suffering from for so long suddenly took flame, and burned me up into a writhing heap. I could not stand, I could hardly speak, and Vyner was really terrified. Barry Gifford was living with us at the time as Vyner's secretary, and it was only thanks to him that I was able to return to Portland Place. I shall never forget that drive to London, when every bump in the road was an agony. Barry drove as carefully as he could but it felt as if we were passing over rocks and jumping ditches, and my agony increased and increased. Sir Henry Simson was sent for, and he said that an operation was urgent. The following morning I was rushed to No. 9 John Street, and the following day a major operation was performed by Simmie. I nearly died—in fact I seemed to be dead until the time came when the numbness passed off, and the agony started again. Why I recovered or how I recovered has remained a miracle to me, but then "Simmie" was a miracle man, and I know I owe my life to him.

I heard from Sir John French, who by then had become the Earl of Ypres. He was in Paris, and did not know much of my illness.

"Sylvia, you are a real darling to write so kindly and sweetly (he said). You are the dearest little pet in the world.

I haven't written (1) because I didn't know your address till I got your last letter, and (2) because I have the most horrible rheumatism in my right hand and writing is really painful! I can't write—as I like to write to you, when I am dictating to a typist! . . .

Sylvia darling, in your letter of October 15th, you wrote as if some great trouble had come to you. Is this so? I loved your letter, but was sorry to think this.

I can't write much now but I very much hope to see you in two weeks or so—I'll just tell you my movements—I can't write more than that.

You know I live at Deal Castle now—and I am going

to 'picnic' over there. I shall be in England for a month and constantly up in London for several days at a time.

Send me a few lines to Deal Castle, Deal, Kent, as to your immediate movements.

God bless you,
As always,
F."

I wrote and told him how ■ I had been and he kept in touch with me for some time, but he could not come and see me because he was still in Paris.

"SYLVIA DEAR (he said in one letter), what infernal bad luck we have! How is it that we have never met? I have your last letter before me now dated June 8th, but not a word or a line since altho' I have written to you! I return the compliment. 'Damn you.'!!!!

Well dear, my news is very uninteresting—I've settled down at Deal Castle and have got my furniture and things safely from Ireland. I spent a little time there this summer but the place is deadly dull! Wouldn't suit you at all, altho' I am hoping to get you there some time. I expect you are back in Sarawak by now, and I hope they'll forward this letter to you . . . I don't know what I am going to do for the winter—I should rather like to spend Christmas at Deal but it's such a deadly place, particularly at that time of year. . . . My dear, what's the use of telling me you had a 'hectic' life—You never had any other. You're always full of 'affairs'!!!!!!

Now do write and tell me your news and when you are coming home again (if indeed you are in the East) and when you will come and see me at Deal.

As always,
Ypres."

I answered his letter at once, and I received one more reply, also written from the Hôtel de Crillon, Paris.

"Thank you, my dear, dear Sylvia for that dear little note you wrote me. I am just out of the nursing home,

but not yet out of medical 'leading strings' and I can't write very much. Your letter was a great joy to me and I read it often in my bed.

This infernal limp has upset all my plans and I don't think I shall travel very far this winter. I hope to be allowed to cross over to England in a week or two, then I shall go to Deal and rest for a bit.

I can't last much longer without a talk with you, so either you must come and see me or I must go up to London and see you! I'll write later when I get to Deal. Forgive this scrawl, dear Sylvia, I only wanted to tell you how I loved your thinking of me.

As always,
Y^R PRES."

These constant references to his lameness, and the fact that he felt ill, was the preliminary to the severe illness that eventually led to his death. The end of his life was slow and painful, and I often thought afterwards that the torture of his operation was really hardly worth while—because there was no cure for him. For a year he lived in and out of nursing homes. I went to see him at the Empire Nursing Home in Vincent Square about a week before he died, and I shall never forget that visit as long as I live. When I went into the room he asked me not to look at him, and begged me not to kiss him. "I am so ugly," he said with an effort to laugh, "I don't want you to remember me like this."

It was as if I was looking at the ghost of my former friend. It seemed impossible that he could be so frail. His hands were so thin and trembling he could hardly lift a glass of water to his lips, and his face was marble white, with his fine features standing out sharply against the pillows. I sat by his bedside and my heart was aching as he talked of old times and the fun we had had together. He spoke of my father, not bitterly, but quietly and very sadly. He wished so much that he had been able to see him before he died. He wished he had been able to return to Deal to die—"It would be lovely there," he said, "because from my window I would be able to see the trees."

He laughed sometimes, but his laughter was more tragic

than tears. He thanked me pathetically for coming. "How the mighty have fallen," he said. "But it has been my own fault. You always told me I was my own enemy." He added with a wry smile, "I've been a damned fool all along." When I said good-bye to him I knew that I would never see him again. I interviewed the matron and asked her what she thought about having him moved to Deal Castle. "It will make no difference," she replied with a sad smile, and those words meant every bit as much as if she had pronounced his death. I told my father and implored him to use his influence, and I must admit my father took infinite trouble, and it was entirely owing to him that this gallant little cavalry leader spent his last four days in peace. He sent a message to me from Deal. "I can lie and watch the people passing," he said. "It is ironically strange how near I am to them and how far they are from me."

I have dwelled somewhat lengthily upon this man because out of all my friends I knew him best. An obstinate, fool-hardy, lovable man whose memory will be forever vivid and very near. He was not a machine, he was a human being, he was not made of cast iron, but flesh and blood.

The children were growing up—their constant visits to Sarawak had developed them, and they were perhaps a little old for their age. The fine old names they had been christened by had been replaced by nicknames—Leonora was "Noni," Elizabeth "Didi," and Valerie "little Vava."

I had been through miserable months of jealousy because Zena's children were so much prettier than mine—Angela was a perfect type of English child, eyes like forget-me-nots, rosy cheeks and teeth like pearls; whereas Leonora was obliged to wear spectacles, and she had a plate in her mouth to force in her front teeth. Tony (Zena's boy) had soft curls and a sweet little wistful face. Elizabeth was colourless and plain and had a plate across her teeth as well. My heart ached for them, and I remember so well my fiendish glee when Angela's leg began to bend because she had begun to walk too soon. I can remember when we were all up in Scotland luring Angela into corners and forcing her to run up and down on purpose to make her leg bend even more. But it was of no avail.

As she grew she straightened, and the Dare beauty would not and could not be suppressed.

Leonora was so full of dreams, and her imagination was vivid and creative of fine things. "Rain was the tears of angels," she would tell me, "but when they are happy they live in little white clouds that go dancing about the sky, and they run races, and that is what makes the trees bend so as to move out of their way.

A shooting star was an angel turning a somersault. She would fill the skies with thoughts like these, and through her spectacles her eyes would widen and look like the palest jade.

Elizabeth was different and dark. She was of constant interest to those about here. Even if she did not speak she subconsciously attracted. From out of her tangled black hair her great eyes loomed—they were like jungle pools, half green, half brown. Her skin was like ivory, and her lips a broad thread of scarlet. Her capacity for love was immeasurable. She had to have it, it was meat and drink to her.

Valerie was square and capable and determined—the little golden curls had been replaced by darker ringlets. She had large brown eyes and a lovely mouth with the most perfect teeth I had ever seen. When she was very small she used to be bullied by Didi, who would pull her ringlets until she gave her what she wanted, but later on she took entire control of Didi, and Didi could not go anywhere or do anything without her. Vava's mind was perfectly organized and balanced, she reminded me of my father in her exactness. But she had a passion for mystery and intrigue. It did not interest her if I knew where she was going or who she was with—the adventure of going out would lose its flavour if I knew which road she was on.

The parties at Portland Place were of great help to the three girls, but I have often wondered since if I was wrong in their upbringing. After they had been presented at Court I did not force them into Society—I gave them a love of Bohemia, and drew them away from those duty parties that might have been necessary to them in after life—they met everyone in the interesting and artistic world, and Elizabeth kept falling in and out of love. George Metaxa, who sang for the first time in England in my house. Jack Buchanan, the

darling of the stage, were her real favourites. Jack took a great interest in Didi, and as she grew up he saw that she might be suited for the stage and for the films. He even took a test of her and offered to give her a leading part and build her into a star. "I can't make her out," he would say to me, with rather a pained look in his sweet, kind eyes. "She doesn't seem to know what she wants. She doesn't seem to have any fixed ideas—she doesn't seem formed like most girls of her age."

He was right. Elizabeth was not formed. She seemed to be a baby in mind compared to the two others—there was about her ■ moody indifference, she seemed to want something, but was unable to decide quite what it was. She would go out night after night smoking and drinking, and creep back in the early hours of the morning unhappy and profoundly bored. She looked unhappy, but I did not notice it until one day at Ascot races I heard someone say as she passed by: "Who on earth is that discontented-looking girl?" and it gave me a shock. Was she really unhappy? And if so, why? How difficult it is for all mothers to see quite clearly through their children's eyes.

I forced Elizabeth to try for the stage, and she started at the Dramatic School of Art. I felt like one of those eager American "Mommas," who are largely responsible for their daughters' fame—I did not care what I did, or what I said as long as I could drive the shadows from that lovely face—the others seemed so happy. Even little Vava had made ■ success of her small life. Vava loved men. She concentrated firmly upon the opposite sex. At the age of ten she fell in love with a house agent who lived quite near, and a few years later a French boy, then Fred Astaire and so on and so forth. Every conceivable film star was pinned upon her wall—there was one particular frame that held the lover of the moment, the back of which was stuffed with failures. She hung to the telephone like a limpet, she made dates and broke them for something more amusing. She was never at a loss for a young man to take her out. In her bag a small book bulged with names and numbers. She was well armed for the matrimonial fray.

Leonora gave up her London life and went into the country.

She wrote poetry and later when she was about twenty years old she published a book of poems called *Wild Orchids*. This book was very beautiful. It was immature, perhaps, in many places and very young, but its Oriental imagery, and the sensitive sweetness of the lines made me feel one day she might create a masterpiece. Strangely enough her poems were mostly about Java where she had never been, but she had always had a yearning towards this lovely land. Strong, passionate poetry, vivid in colour and expression, written mostly when she was but fifteen.

And so as the three children grew up their environment seemed to fill our home, and take the place of what had once been ours. Young men came and went in an endless stream of favourites and "cast-offs". No sooner had I begun to know some man than he had vanished and some other face appeared hopeful at first and then disconsolate and then gone again when there was no hope left. Life seemed easier for these girls than it had been for me. They did not have to stand in a row of anxious and God knows how willing virgins waiting to be asked out to a dinner or a dance. A ring on the telephone, a few such epithets as "darling" or "my sweet" and the evening's outing was secured. It is beauty that holds the winning card. A girl can be a genius and never see the lights of night club life. They may not always marry, these "lovelies" but they can eat, drink, and be merry in their youth, and find life sweet. I was fairly clever in my corner of the world, but, had I not fought and scrambled and talked myself and others into a state of helpless bewilderment I would never have had a meal outside my house. A man came up to me the other evening and looked at me most earnestly. "Your daughter Didi is so beautiful," he said. "How on earth did you happen to have such a lovely child?" And then he gave me another look and sighed. "A freak of nature, I suppose," he added. They have no mercy these men, they are spoilt because the standard of beauty to-day is of such height.

And so we continued our Bohemian life. Sometimes we went into Society but it was never a success. Vyner was like a wild thing at the very mention of a social function, and dug himself deeper and deeper into his hermit's life.

There was one shaming thing that happened to me I do not

think I shall ever forget, the sort of thing that made one's face scorch and the tears come into one's eyes. It was at a charity ball—a really smart affair at which our present King, who was then Prince of Wales, was present. At one end of the room there was a scarlet covered dais and upon the dais the Prince of Wales and members of the Court were seated. Leonora and I were at the ball accompanied by Barry Gifford who was at that time our private secretary. But unfortunately Barry was not himself. He was gay and in one of those moods in which a man will do the most impossible and uncontrollable things. For some unaccountable reason I was invited to be seated on the dais. I was very nervous and timid and trying to behave in the right way. Barry was dancing round in a somewhat conspicuous manner, and his look of profound astonishment at seeing where I was filled me with dismay. I had a horrible feeling that something really terrible was about to happen, and sure enough something terrible did happen about the third time he danced round. I heard his voice echoing in my ears and it said: "Here—look after this for me, will you," and I saw his opera hat whizzing over the heads of those that were on the dais, and falling with a thud at my feet. Then there seemed to me to be an awful pause, even the band had stopped playing, and everyone seemed to be standing round the dais, staring. The Prince of Wales looked up and laughed and said: "I suppose you will sack him in the morning." But I felt I would never laugh again. I crept down from my dais and I went home, and I did not venture into Society for quite a long time after. Whenever I am asked what has been the most terrible moment in my life, this one rises immediately to the surface of my mind.

It was not long after this that my father died, and the two who had been so happy together until after their golden wedding were parted. It was a terrible shock to my mother, one moment he was alive and laughing, and the next he was lying on the floor, and when she found him he was dead. I do not think there can be any grander finale to a splendid

life than this. He had toiled and striven for England. He had worked for two things only, his country and his King. His public life had not been easy, but he had been meted out ■ quiet and easy death. My mother behaved with amazing fortitude. She never let us see how much she was hurt. She never let us see any tears in her eyes. She was so wonderful over it all that it seemed almost superhuman, as if beneath that gentle and kindly calm her heart must break.

I published another book. It was called *The Cauldron*, ■ book of short stories horrible and grim, a kind of *Grand Guignol* of the East. Nash and Grayson were my publishers, and I think it was brave and extremely kind of them to print a book about the sale of which they could not have been anything but dubious. I illustrated it myself. Little pen drawings of each story. I know I was far more proud of these illustrations than ever I was of the tales that I had told. In the preface I said that my book was "a collection of unimportant things that, when flung into the Cauldron expanded and assumed monstrous proportions." Many of the stories were true. The critics commended them for their power and characterization, and for the literary form in which they were cast. "In *The Cauldron*," they said, "we have a book of short stories that convey not a little of the emotion that is experienced at the first reading of *Macbeth*. It is a brilliant book."

It is a curious fact that although I have written essays and romances of Sarawak, although I have explained minutely where it is, people persist in saying it is in India. It seems that to the simple English mind the East is India, and whatever I may say to contradict it, I am supposed to be the wife of a wealthy Indian prince.

When George Arliss was playing in the *Green Goddess*, I wrote to him and asked him if the story had in any way been inspired by Sarawak. He replied *No*, most emphatically, but that he would like to meet us both at Claridge's at lunch. We went. It was an enormous party and I saw that frantic, hunted look spring into Vyner's face. We became great friends, George Arliss and Florence his wife and I, and sometimes I went to stay with them at St. Margaret's Bay. I found him one of the most exceptional of men. His personality, his brain, and his delightful sense of humour.



Stage Photo Co.

GIVING MR. GEORGE ARLISS THE SARAWAK "BIRD"



Star Photo Co.

MIR. JACK BUCHANAN

He and Florence were devoted, it was wonderful to watch them in their home. They were both fond of animals, and they loved their outdoor life. To my mind he is the greatest English artist on the screen to-day, for he has an unmistakable face, and a strong personality to overcome. He may have mannerisms, but if he has they are better than most people's gestures. He never forces a scene or raises his voice above the lovely tone that is soul-stirring and far-reaching. He is simple and has not the slightest conceit. Slim, transparent almost, he has an air of frailty that is in truth deceptive. I sent him the details of a play I was at work on for him, and this was his reply:

"DEAREST RANEE,

I am thrilled that you have nearly finished the play—I know I shan't like it. No play is ever any good that is written for me. I mean, no good for me. But I know it will be clever, so I am most anxious to read it.

Just what the gentleman says to the lady at the moment you mention depends largely upon what the lady has said to the gentleman the moment before. The dialogue is usually very brief in real life. I have known it to be confined to the single phrase, 'Hullo Duckyl' In order to avoid any trouble with the Censor I should recommend just (He) Darling. . . .

Our love to you,

Yours,
G. A."

I had several letters from him, and they were nearly always about my work, or else a date when we should meet. I love his films and I love him and his wife. They are two of the treasures I keep stored up in the memory of my friends.

It was not long after this that I met King George of Greece at a dinner-party given by Mrs. Converse. At first I was a little afraid to venture near him, but chance threw us together on that fortunate evening, and I made a friend I knew I should never forget. He had a quick and charming humour and he loved to tease, and yet all the while he could keep a quiet dignity even when he was in the midst of teasing me. I admired him

enormously, for he had the strength to stand aside and wait, and having waited, to obtain what was in his heart to have.

I sent him *Toys*, and *The Cauldron* to read. But *Toys* was the first to arrive. He wrote to me after he had read it, which was kind of him and thoughtful.

"MY DEAR RANEE,

. . . Your book interested me really very much. What a restless time that poor soul must have had being reincarnated so often without really finding much peace. It is really a very great subject which you have handled with skill. I am looking forward for the next book which you so very kindly promised me. I do hope you will not forget about it.

Please forgive me for not having written any sooner, but I was only given your letter last night. It was too nice of you to send me that charming letter and it particularly touched me that you were able to do so in your condition.

Hoping to see you soon again in perfect health,

I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

GEORGE—R."

When I sent him *The Cauldron* he wrote again:

"MY DEAR RANEE,

Thousands and ever so many thanks for your interesting book. I thought it most fascinating and thrilling. It gives me a lot to think over and I am afraid does not spare Europeans. . . . I do hope some white people do show up a bit better occasionally out East. You are right, I think, about the average person going out into the world being narrow-minded and prejudiced. It is a pity that people are not more broad in views and ready to study nature and the world, instead of always knowing better. I must say your book interested me enormously. . . ."

He was not the only one who considered my stories a cruel attack upon the European out East. Some of the critics



Hay Wrightson

II.H. KING GEORGE OF GREECE



Art Photo Service

WYNER AND MYSELF

objected to it strongly. "The rage for showing what a nasty fascinating place is the East," one said, "no doubt justifies the production of a bookful of short stories called *The Cauldron*. . . . Each story is a warning to the young Englishman not to leave Balham and Surbiton for the East." Another critic said that they were excellent stories for a railway journey. He could not have been more crushing if he had tried. My book was not meant to cast a slur upon the Englishmen out East. It was meant to be a book of sketches upon the gradual wearing down of men's endurance, not by violence, but by little things such as the tapping of a bird's beak against a tree, or the cry of a beetle, or the lashing of the rain upon a roof. I wanted those who read my book to feel the wet, warm atmosphere, and scent the perfumed air with me. I did not want them to fear the East, but to understand its lure.

Very soon after *The Cauldron* was written I started on what I consider to-day is really my best book. The colour question and race prejudice had formed a baffling question in my mind. Those with mixed blood who wandered in loneliness, in a kind of lost world of their own. What was to become of them, which way were they to turn. My story was told of the lives of Henry and Helen Golightly, the children of a white father and a Malay mother, how they were sent home to England by their father to be educated by his spinster sister. I told of their life in a little country village, and then in London, and the fate that befell them out East.

This book was fairly well reviewed but I could feel the antagonism in the critic's minds. They were not interested in my subject, they did not care that there was a race that had no ultimate conclusion. The tragedy of colour meant nothing to them. How could it, as they sat in some office in the City and read my book? How could they possibly visualize the problem of Eurasians? And so I went on writing and endeavouring to gain some foothold in the literary world. I would not be beaten. I saw no reason why my efforts should be passed over or ignored. Vyner was only enthusiastic when he appeared in any of the tales, but I think I was too sugary and sentimental for his taste.

Then quite suddenly Maurice died. It seemed impossible to believe. He had been out shooting only a few hours before.

Once more my poor mother was obliged to face a second tragedy, and another chair was empty in her room. Zena was in a play with Ivor Novello at the time, and I cannot imagine anything more terrible than having to act before an audience who knew of her bereavement, and sympathized by the warmth of their applause.

When we returned to London I re-started my Bohemian parties. I must confess that there were one or two I "collected" in an extremely unorthodox way. I am afraid I rather traded on my name. I sent notes across a restaurant. Sometimes messages. I met Noel Coward for the first time in this way, and Ramon Navarro and Carl Brisson. It was wrong, I know, but, oh, it was fun to see the look of astonishment—the raised eyebrows, and the inquiring but somewhat quizzical smile directed at me.

Noel came often to our house. He loved the children or "chicks" as he would call them. There could not be a more entertaining companion than he, or such a champagne humour and infectious laugh. He promised always that he would visit Sarawak, but he has been unable to do so yet. Sarawak is so much off the beaten track, we are not often visited except by submarines and flying boats. Once when we were in Singapore I met Charlie Chaplin and his brother Syd. They were staying at the Adelphi Hotel and Didi and I were at Raffles. I sent my customary note to Charlie Chaplin and asked if I could call on him. I gave no reason, but said simply: "I would like to meet you so much, may I?" The answer came that I was to join them at their hotel, so Didi and I sallied forth feeling a little nervous and apprehensive, like a couple of schoolgirl "fans" on their way to get autographs. The two men were having lunch when we arrived, so we waited for them in the hall. Outside the hotel an immense crowd had gathered, waiting for this great little man to come out. He was very shy and an inspiration came to me as I was presented to him. "Would you like to come for a drive away from all this?" I said. "If so, I know a lovely place where no one will be able to find you."

Never had I seen a man look more grateful. But Syd Chaplin, who had spent the morning at the dentist's, said he thought he would go and lie down. We ran through the

waiting crowds, took a headlong leap into the car, and were off before the astonished people half realized who he was, and so we started on our way to Sea View.

I cannot quite describe the sensation or interpret what it was about this little man that made him different from anyone I had ever met before. It was not only genius, it could not have been, there was something else. An elusive fawn-like charm that held you spellbound. He was enthralling. He talked and talked, and all the while he illustrated everything he was saying with his beautifully expressive hands. His eyes were the softest blue, exactly the colour of that little flower called "Love in a Mist" and from his brow his white hair swept into small waves. I envied him his hair.

He hated smells. It was an absolute obsession with him, and he would carry about with him a scented handkerchief with which he could cover his face as we went through the Bazaar. The road between Singapore and Sea View was notorious for its variety of odours. "If it gets too bad," Charlie Chaplin said, "I shall pass out." And it was true. A very bad smell and this amazing man would actually fall back in a faint. It dated, so he told me, from the time when he was a little boy. "I was walking in the street," he said, "when I met a small kiddie ragged and filthy, whose face was smeared in jam. But it wasn't only the jam, there were flies crawling all over it, and into the kiddie's mouth. I had to go home and be sick. Now, whenever I smell anything nasty I think of that kiddie's face and those flies, and I just pass completely out."

We were six hours with Charlie Chaplin sitting on the Sea View Beach, but it seemed when we left him again at the Adelphi Hotel as if we had only been with him for a moment. I hope one day our paths will re-cross and that I shall be able to spend some other wonderful hours with California's greatest little clown.

Leonora became engaged to Max Ausnit, a Rumanian Senator. We had known him a long time. He was charming

and kind, and immensely rich, he and his brother being the great majority proprietors of four big iron-steel sheet works called "Titan Nadrag Calan" Company Ltd., which included 30,000 acres of forest, and I should imagine had a value of about two million pounds. Max was chairman of all this, and his brother managing director. They also had a control over the "Privileged Austrian State Railway Co." of Vienna where Max was managing director. There were many other companies to which he belonged, and he owned large tracts of forest everywhere. He was of Jewish faith, had innumerable friends, and could not have been a kinder man, but he was a foreigner, and Leonora hopelessly and typically English. When she became engaged to him she had not imagined what living abroad most of her life would mean. How she would be obliged to tear herself away from home and family and friends. She could not speak a word of French, she felt helpless and bewildered and a little afraid. I shall never forget the day she told Max that it could not be. We were in Cannes being entertained, spending a week with him, and the way he behaved all through that week knowing that Noni would not marry him showed him up for the great-hearted man that he was. We all remained friends, and now Max has married a lovely Rumanian girl, and Noni is also married and has a son. It was not very long after her broken engagement that she fell in love with a man on board the P. and O. *Carthage* on her way home from Sarawak. At least that was the story I first heard, and the next thing I heard was that that man was the Earl of Inchcape. What had happened was this—they had met quite casually on board, and she had been attracted at once, but somehow she did not trouble to find out who he was. One day they were discussing the P. and O. ships and Noni laughed at him and said: "You seem to know a lot about everything."

"Well yes," he replied, "you see, I happen to own this line."

Leonora laughed again, she laughed very loudly so I am told. "Now I'll tell you one," she cried, "I happen to be the Queen of Sheba."

He never told her even then who he was, and it was only when she received an invitation from the Earl of Inchcape to



Centre



Edwin Neame

Above: THE COUNTESS OF INCHCAPE, AND SIMON

Below: THE EARL OF INCHCAPE



VALERIE

have cocktails in his cabin, that, to her horror she saw that what he had told her was true.

They were married at St. George's, Hanover Square. A beautiful wedding with a beautiful bride, and I became the possessor of a son-in-law of whom I was a little in awe, but whom I loved. Kenneth Inchcape seemed on the surface a little formidable, but as a matter of fact I very soon found him to be possessed of extraordinary charm. He has one of the sweetest smiles in the world, a slow, shy smile that only remains for a moment and then vanishes. He is simple, kindly and devoted to his home. His houses are arranged in exquisite taste, and he takes great personal pride in them. His rooms are mostly French, and there are pictures of Napoleon so much resembling him that one can understand his attraction to that period. His children are charming, and my little grandson the most charming of them all. I have never yet become quite used to the idea that the small girl with the plate in her mouth, and enormous spectacles on her extremely diminutive nose, has grown into this glorious golden girl, whose beauty cannot be denied.

The next to be married was Angela Brett, and I became anxious over my little Black Sheep whose discontent had grown. Angela's husband was tall and good-looking, a boy she had known some years. It was a happy, suitable marriage; my heart sank. What would become of Elizabeth, the girl with the drooping mouth and the little black devils that hung upon her shoulders and made her moody and dull? She went hither and thither. Her career at the Dramatic School of Art was short but spectacular. She rose from the ranks of small parts to the lead, and it was while she was there that we first met Cyril Horrocks. I first saw Cyril playing in an exhibition performance of *Journey's End*. I liked him so much that I wrote him one of my little notes and asked if he would lunch with me at the Three Arts Club. It was a thrilling experience waiting for a total stranger, and it was more exciting still endeavouring to find out what he was like. I found him intelligent and good-looking, with an enormous sense of humour, and a friendship sprang up between us that has remained until this day.

Owing to Elizabeth being at the Royal School of Art, I

renewed my interest in the stage and in plays and the writing of plays. I tried to begin with two short sketches for Gwen Farrar, who was a great friend of mine. When I sent her the ideas for these sketches she was enthusiastic, and she wrote to me from her charming little house in Chelsea.

"DEAREST SYLVIA,

I think both your ideas are marvellous. Please couldn't you write them *both*. Condense them into a five or ten minutes' sketch, and I think if they are as good as I think they are, that both can be put in a Show.

Much love always,

GWEN."

I wrote them, but evidently they were not as good as she thought they were because I never heard of them again.

Then I became ambitious and I wrote a three-act play. It was called *The Heels of Pleasure*, and was upon my pet theme, the questions of Eurasians and mixed blood. With the help of Charlie Dudley Ward this play was presented at the Arts Theatre Club on a trial run of a week. This seemed to me to be the height of all sensation—to hear the words that one had written being brought to life. I was racked and tormented by the tragedy of this little half-caste girl, and so were my friends. But the critics in a mass disliked the theme, and were disgusted with my treatment of it. One or two agreed that my dialogue was as good as Noel Coward's. I kept these notices and thrust them under the noses of managers, but they would not bite. Kate Cutler's performance as the over-fond, foolish mother was superb. But then Kate has a finesse and an exquisite art that is quite her own. Gabrielle Casartelli was ideal in the part of my little Eurasian heroine, Ernestina Lee.

Whatever the critics might have said to the contrary, I myself feel that there were things in that play of mine that raised it from out of the ordinary ruck. It was clumsily constructed, and amateur and ignorant of the set rules of the theatre. But it was alive—and Ernestina Lee was real. Richard Purdell, in a minute study of a half-caste man, was ■ genuine study, only nobody knew it, and nobody wanted to

know; the play eked out its six days and then died. No excited managers rang me up for it, no film magnates begged for the rights of it. Only my friends said: "Go on—you have it in you—try and try again."

It was unfortunate for me that George Arliss was away during that week, because he with his brilliant brain and honest opinion would have been of tremendous help to me. However, he wrote to me from 14 Laughlin Park, Hollywood, and said how sorry he was he could not be there.

"From
GEORGE ARLISS,
14 LAUGHLIN PARK,
HOLLYWOOD.
July 13th, 1929.

DEAR RANEE,

We are sorry we couldn't be present to see your play last June 23rd or even June 25th. But we are glad you thought of us. As you wrote it for me it seems too bad that I couldn't even have read it. How did it go off? I am most anxious to hear about it.

We leave Hollywood about the end of this month. Then go to N.Y. We shall probably stay there a week and then sail for England—about the middle of August. I do hope you will still be in London or at any rate within reach. We are dying to hear all your news. Our visit this year is likely to be short—but I am sure not even of that. I wish you could know Hollywood: it would interest you and amuse you. I have just finished my second 'talky.' The first was *The Green Goddess* and the second *Disraeli*. I suppose my voice will sound like the banging of an old tin can when it gets into the theatres, but it doesn't sound so bad in the studio.

Our love to you,
Yours always,
GEORGE ARLISS."

I then wrote a play I thought would be right for the exquisite art of Marie Tempest. It was called *Persecuted Parents*, and the idea was that instead of the mothers pushing their

young out of the nest when they were grown up, as the birds do, that the children drove their parents from their home. It was a comedy, of course, but it had in it one dramatic scene between the eldest daughter Constance and her mother. This scene was my undoing as far as Marie Tempest was concerned. I sent the play to Mr. Graham Browne and this was his reply:

"55, AVENUE ROAD,
REGENT'S PARK,
N.W.8.
3rd April, '30.

"MY DEAR LADY,

I'm not going to say that this is the dreamed-of play, but it is so far above the average that I get, that I read it with great pleasure.

My main objection to it for Marie Tempest is that the part is not quite good enough for her. It has little or no comedy and is quite overshadowed by Constance. It is not a 'star' play though it is none the worse for that. It is too short also by about ten minutes on each act. Lastly, to get all my grouses over, I don't believe in the husband's attitude. It's all very well to be modern but I think you go a little too far in his complaisance. He might protest a little over his wife's living with another man even though he is his best friend. You might too explain why he went away and stayed all those years. Apart from these points your play has very fine qualities. The young people are very good and there is a definite theme—a very recognisable problem: the claim of the parent to interfere with the lives of the children. It is a battle that is always being fought, always has been. Then you have the constant irritating claim of the house-proud wife to make everyone's life a misery by the incessant tidying up. Both of these motifs will find a sympathetic audience. But you must either treat them more seriously or more farcically.

In Constance you have a rather tragic figure and you could by keeping the husband on the same plane have a serious study of the tragedies caused by the excessively mothering, house-proud sort of woman or you could take the thing into the sort of play Noel Coward wrote in *Hay Fever*.

You can do either and have a good play. In the former instance you could show how Lady Clare drove her husband out of the house by her excessive claims on his time and energies, putting petty social things above his life work, interfering with him at all times and seasons till he found he couldn't do anything he wanted to do because of the infernal swaddling and petting and tidiness. You would have a real play in this.

Please forgive this long and rather vague screed. My excuse is that you have very nearly written a fine play and I think you have it in you to eliminate the 'very nearly'.

Yours sincerely,

W. GRAHAM BROWNE.

My wife read the play before me and came to the same conclusions."

I wrote and thanked him warmly for his letter. I thought it so charming of him to write at all. As a rule my manuscripts were returned with compliments only. I was so grateful to him for taking trouble and telling me. If more help was given to new authors instead of their being ignored, the standard of plays would, I feel sure, be higher.

He thanked me for my letter.

"DEAR RANEE (he said),

Your letter is almost the first I've had that has accepted my blunt criticism with a show of enthusiasm. I am really glad if I have been of any assistance. Play-writing is the most tricky and difficult form of literature. You cannot bracket your target, you must hit it every time.

I don't say that your play is necessarily for Marie Tempest, but there are others, and I'm quite sure that the less you make Constance a popular figure the more suitable it will be to M. T. If it grows into a real study of the woman and has no timid reservations the part becomes worthy of a star actress. One note of warning, there was a play called *The Silver Cord* which is a little like your play. You must watch carefully to see that you don't suggest it. If you have not seen it don't read it till *after* you have

written your play; then you can remove any points of resemblance. To read it now would cramp your invention and make you self-conscious all the time you are writing.

Thank you for the invitation to lunch. We would both like to come but I *may* be rehearsing a new play next week and anyway I've got to fit in rehearsals for a benefit *matinée* in which my wife is playing. Will you ask us later?

Yours sincerely,

W. GRAHAM BROWNE."

For years I have not written—there has been no incentive and no urge. Managers are asking for plays and producers are crying out for film stories, but if you send them they are not read, and because you are unknown they take it for granted your work is of no use. I think they are wrong especially over films. They keep themselves too much within themselves. They are turning out stories like sausages from out of a machine. They know too much of the technique and too little of their public's mind. They throw great stars upon the screen with mediocre dialogue, and slothful action. The stars carry the film maybe, but not the story. We read our papers and the critics tell us such and such a film is N.B.G. Technically this may be true, but as a story it appeals to us and we are its public. The ordinary layman—the man-in-the-street, he is the one who knows best. But, in everything to do with plays, the public are kept out until it is too late. I am not saying this out of bitterness because I have been rejected, not by any means, and neither have I given up hope. But America seems miles above us in dialogue, and in the lyrics to their songs. We are still in the "Roses round the door" stage, we cannot move from sentimentality—conservative to the end we shall go on until our lumps of sugar dissolve and are no longer seen, and the slabs of raw meat from America have taken their place.

At last came Elizabeth's marriage. It had run an uncertain and uneven course for many months until with a sudden jerk

it seemed to straighten out, and the way was clear for them. I think I can say without exaggeration that her wedding day was one of the happiest days of my whole life. I knew that Harry Roy was right for her and that she would be perfect for him. The roar of disapproval and talk meant nothing. We stood up in line, Vyner and my mother and I, and defied all comment. I received anonymous letters: "This marriage was an awful scandal," so they said, "and the talk of every West End hotel. I was a disgrace to the aristocracy; I was letting the blue blood of England loose upon the soil." One woman was overheard to say that I was so ashamed of the Roy family that we were selling our houses, and retiring from public life. The woman who said that was supposed to be my friend, and it was Harry's mother who overheard what she said. Of course she was hurt and terribly upset, indeed who would not have been, and it took many months to convince her that not a word of this was true. There is no crueller weapon than that of the spoken word, but even these anonymous letters and scandal-mongers have been unable to draw us apart. We are all of us the best of friends and so we shall always remain. I shall never forget Didi's wedding, and the great crowds that surged round Harry. If ever he had been dubious about his popularity, his wedding day must have proved to him definitely how much he had won the people's hearts. It would be impossible to know Harry well and not to love him, even the most prejudiced have gradually been won over. Only the stage have stood out against this marriage—the stage still intensely disapproves; indeed, one or two of my friends of the drama have ceased to remember I exist. Harry to some of them is a "Wop," whatever that may mean, but how little it matters to him or to us. We love him, and Didi adores him, and it is her happiness and her life only that counts. She has been the pioneer of a new belief—a belief that everyone is equal and that whatever garb a man or a woman may walk in upon the earth, they are of the same pattern when they fall into their graves. Didi defied convention quietly and gently, her dreamy, contented nature was not stirred by argument and talk. To-day she is happier than yesterday, and to-morrow may be the happiest day of all. Gone are the black devils, the moody, sulky silences, the discontented mouth. And it is the little man with

the wistful eyes and whimsical ways who has accomplished in less than a year what I could not do for her even from the time she was born.

Harry Roy is not like an ordinary band leader. He is the greatest little showman of his time—he has magic in the movement of his hands, small, expressive hands that are never for one moment still. He and Didi have just completed their first film. By the time this book has been published, it will have been released. I have seen it several times, and of course I am biased. Indeed I do not think it would be possible to find anybody who would not have been so when daughter and son-in-law were taking the lead. But apart from my affection I feel convinced that at last England will be able to have its own Charlie Chaplin, and that a tremendous future awaits these two upon the screen. If we do not see it, America will, that there is genius in Harry and a beautiful repose and poise about his wife—trained and drilled and developed they may yet ascend and reach the topmost ladder to the stars.

My journeys to and from Sarawak had been for the last twenty-five years almost yearly. There were certain winter months when I dreaded the sleet and the snow, and I arranged to live out East. I suppose really it was an almost ideal state—to be able to pack one's boxes and leave the cold winds and the yellow fogs behind. I nearly always went by P. and O., and of course when Leonora married Kenneth there was no other line. There was one man I met upon these travels whose friendship I retained, and whose affection I knew that I would always value—Prince Aly Khan just happened to be aboard one year when Vyner and Elizabeth and Valerie and I were on our way out East and we grew to know him, and to love him, and to understand his mind. For Aly Khan needed understanding—he was shy and in his shyness like so many people never at his best. He seemed to me to be on the defensive most of the time, as if he could sense an antagonism and a disapproval oozing its way throughout the ship. Our fellow travellers did not treat him well. Remarks were bandied about

by some of the men and women who were possessed with the over-British zeal that is so apparent and so objectionable on most of our journeys out East. If English people consider themselves so superior to other races, why in Heaven's name do they travel abroad? I have so often thought that an English tourist was like a snail that carried his country on his back. But the P. and O. passengers were a particular kind of snail who never shed his shell, and never endeavoured to find shelter beneath any roof that was not of his own making. British he will stand, uncomfortable, hot, blue glasses and white topee and University accent, an unmistakable type of an unmistakable race. He may have had a "Spot of India, don't you know," nevertheless he dislikes all Indians at sight. His dislike will permeate the ship. It will be a noisy, unpleasant clanging in the ears of Indian princes, rajahs, Indian lancers and Indian students who are on board. They imagine the P. and O. belongs to them, these Colonial Office and Government officials. They turn over the food and dig and delve until they find some cause for its abuse—they write in their complaints at the end of every trip. Out of a menu of immense variety they cannot find a decent thing to eat. The sweating and over-tired stewards do not do enough work. It is "too damned uncomfortable for words, and equally damned badly run"—The London offices are bombarded with reproaches and abuse—But if they would only hesitate to consider what kind of a task it was, running ships between England and the East—if they would only sit down and write out a four weeks' menu that infuriated and unwilling passengers could eat—for there are many people who arrive on board bristling with the purpose of abusing everything that may take place on board—it is more than probable they abuse their own homes if only one took the trouble to inquire.

But Aly and Vyner and the children and I remained friends throughout that trip. We saw him arrive at dawn in Bombay, and emerge on deck stripped of his white flannels and his open shirt, and in a coat of silk and gold and with a turban on his head. We saw the happy-go-lucky laughing boy change before our eyes into the mystery of an Eastern atmosphere, and what before had been simple and quiet and content,

became like a legend, and made all those who witnessed it silent and absorbed.

And now for the last time I must tell of Sarawak and its changes—for, of course, like everything else it was bound to move and draw up in line with the times. It has been like a transformation scene to me, as curtain after curtain has lifted revealing the full beauty of Sarawak as it is to-day. When my mother-in-law first saw Kuching, so she has often told me, it had been but a little place straggling along the mud banks of the river with few roads and no buildings of amusement. The people had been entirely unspoilt and untouched by English education—until another curtain lifted, and there was a model town, clean and white and prosperous, with mission houses and three schools. Once again the curtain lifted and there were bungalows dotted upon the bright green slopes and spreading along the sides of the Rock Road. There were bridges across the river and on land, and right in front of the town was the "Sylvia Cinema," Vyner's own picture house that he had built and that belonged exclusively to him. We are told by everyone who has seen it, that it is the finest cinema in the East, and even in Singapore they are forced to admit it is superior. We see the very latest films. Sometimes before they even reach England. It fills our empty hours and covers our wet days. It livens our despondency, it helps our dinner-parties and entertains our guests.

People have often asked me what there is that is really different in Sarawak to what there is at home. And, on thinking it over, I believe it is the children. I love children, all my life I have loved them and longed for them and thought that no house could be complete without them. There do not seem to be really children in Sarawak—there are babies, and then small, immature women, infant mothers at the age of about thirteen. Our girls of twelve are romping and running in their schools with no thoughts in their minds but the tiresomeness of lessons and the infinite joy of games. The little Malay girls walk sedately, they are powdered and perfumed, with gold bracelets on their wrists, gold necklaces about their throats, and coloured veils upon their thickly braided hair. Fruit ripens easily beneath the tropical sun. It is a toyless land where happiness lies within themselves.

A discarded motor tyre becomes a magic wheel, an empty box ■ carriage, and a piece of wood a wonder ship with a strip of torn cloth for a sail. Unspoilt—unclothed these babies stretch their small brown bodies in the sun, clutching on to the simple things in life because it is all they have ever known or ever seen.

I have made many mistakes in their language since I first went out to Sarawak. I remember once a Malay woman asking me if I had a "gambar." Now I knew that their stock question to me was always to ask me if I had ■ son—so I took it for granted that that was what she meant, and I replied promptly that I had not. "Oh," she said smilingly, "the Tuan Rajah he has many."

I went home burning with righteous indignation. So this was what my parents had meant when they had told me that life out East was hard, and had warned me to wait and think things over. The moment Vyner arrived home from the office I flew at him. "You've got gambars!" I cried, "and you never told me. Oh, how could you!"

"I never thought you wanted one," he replied, laughing. "Why, of course, you shall have one at once." It was then that I discovered that "gambar" meant a camera.

Within the last two years I have taken to flying to Sarawak and back—and I shall never forget my first flight home, and the agony of fear, and then the peace, and then the agony again. I am not naturally a coward, but I do not believe I shall ever overcome the horror of tossing in the clouds, or being wind-swept across miles and miles of grey-green sea, with the long shadows of the sharks lurking below our plane.

Elizabeth and Pat Mackay travelled with me, and I was a little anxious about Didi because I was not sure how she would take this long journey through the skies. It was the first time she had ever been up, and only her intense desire to return to Harry had induced her to attempt it.

We left Singapore air base at 6.15 a.m. It was still dark, but as we rose higher and higher we came into the dawn. The effect was very lovely. The name of our plane was *Astrae*, the name of the pilot, Captain Youell.

We passed over the famous Singapore naval base—the floating dock was all lit up, and there was a flotilla of destroyers

anchored close by. Away we soared over sea and jungle, occasionally there were air pockets that tossed us to and fro, but on the whole the journey was quiet. It was a little hot and stuffy in the plane, but not uncomfortable.

At eight o'clock our breakfast baskets were handed to us—hard-boiled eggs, chicken and ham, rolls, marmalade, butter and fruit and steaming hot coffee was given us from the little kitchen on board.

It was then 9.45 and we were nearing Penang. We had to come down from 4000 to 2500 feet, a rapid descent that had deafened and numbed our ears. In fact this ear trouble was the most trying part of the whole trip, and nothing that one could do would really prevent it.

The padi fields were like brilliant billiard tables amidst a setting of palm trees. The visibility over Penang was misty, but I could see the outline of the famous hill. The sea was like a blue mirror, and with us reflected over sea and jungle was the little shadow of our plane in hot pursuit.

We arrived at Alor Star at 10.30. There we found the Resident and his wife waiting to meet us. There was a charming rest house, where we washed and smoked and drank gin-and-gingers. We were very gay. The pilot, Captain Youell, was quite charming, and did his best to keep us cheerful and good-tempered.

We started again at 11.30. It was very bumpy and impossible either to write or read, as we were jerked right out of our seats. It was not a sickening motion but exhilarating, because it was in a way terrifying. We climbed and climbed 7000 feet, the earth looked like a miniature garden below us; roads like ivory ribbons threaded in and out of plains and trees, and soft loose clouds floated in detached groups like broken cotton-wool. At last the bumping was over, and we soared smoothly and evenly towards Bandon. We landed at a place called Kokluk to refuel. The real name of this place was Prachua-likhirikun; it was only a remote fuelling station upon a parched and arid sand. We arrived at Bangkok at 5.30 p.m. after ■ beautiful flight over perfect sea and little soft islands dotted about on either side.

Darkness was descending upon Bangkok, but there was just light enough to see the town. I was taken for ■ drive round

but I was not impressed with Bangkok. The prettiest things about it were the "streamline" temples, they were slender and graceful, and beautifully coloured. We stayed at the Oriental Hotel on the edge of the river, an hotel with a glorious view. There was one decent bedroom in the hotel, which I was given.

We left the hotel at 5.30 a.m., and the aerodrome at 7. We rose to 12,000 feet on our way to Rangoon. It was cold, large clouds of a dazzling whiteness were below us, and below the clouds there were undulating blue-black jungle trees. The time went back one hour. At 9.15 we came upon Rangoon, and flew low, about 2000 feet, so that we could see the beauty of its lakes, the golden temple, and the green trees on the sand. Then it was gone, and we were at the aerodrome beyond Rangoon where breakfast was supplied and the plane refuelled. In an hour we were off again on our way to Akyab, three hundred and eleven miles from Rangoon. It was bumpy then until we flew over the sea. Akyab itself was charming, with friendly people who had arranged tables and chairs beneath some casuarina trees and provided tea. Flying was still quite a novelty to the natives there, and they crowded round us staring and grinning. They were an ugly race and did not look very clean, but they had nice teeth and soft dark eyes.

As soon as the plane was refuelled we started again across a limitless expanse of sea. No land anywhere, just the sea like miles and miles of silver mirror. Lunch was provided on the plane packed in Mahjong cases, and the wireless operator brought us some barley water which was really good.

The mouth of the Ganges was a network of little rivers coiling in and out of what appeared at that altitude to be smooth green plains and moss. Bunches of trees and native houses were scattered about, but we were so high above them that they looked like toys.

We arrived at Calcutta at 5.30 p.m. The aerodrome was about fifteen miles away from the town. Calcutta was one of the big disappointments of my life; I had always imagined it with fine white buildings and impressive streets, but as I drove through the town I found myself saying over and over again: "Can this possibly be Calcutta?"

Bullocks were asleep on the pavements. Thousands of Indians thronged over the narrow streets. The buildings

were square and ugly, even in what was called the principal street. There was no real beauty of construction. It was unbelievably, unquestionably drab.

We spent the night in a beautiful house where English flowers grew in profusion—hollyhocks, snapdragons, phlox and carnations. The Saturday Club was opposite this house, and we went for a swim before dinner. Unfortunately there was no time to see more of Calcutta, for we were off next morning at 5 a.m. We flew over flat plains that stretched as far as the horizon on either side. Dull and uninteresting, but safe-feeling. We landed at Gaya at 8 o'clock to refuel. It was a God-forsaken spot. Then in half an hour on to Allahabad. The aerodrome again was some way away from the town, so we could not see much. It was 11.30, and we had breakfast. After that, on again to Cawnpore to refuel. The country was still flat and uninteresting, and there was a strong head wind. The way from Cawnpore to Delhi was hot and bumpy. As we neared Delhi, the whole area round and about us consisted of rice fields. Immense eagles flew straight at our machine, and the pilot was obliged to dodge them. We descended at the Delhi Aerodrome and had a meal, half tea, and half lunch. Delhi itself looked lovely from the air.

It was now 6.45, and we were on our way to Jodhpur. We could not go any further than that. We were night flying. We passed over tiny lit-up villages. We arrived at Jodhpur at 8.30—very, very tired. All we could see of the town was a fairyland of lights. We descended by the help of flares and found a really nice hotel, small, but extraordinarily comfortable. It was 10 o'clock before we had dinner, at 11.30 we were in bed. At 3 a.m. we were up again, leaving the aerodrome at 4 o'clock. It was very beautiful watching the night turn into a scarlet sunrise. But our progress to Karachi was slow. There was unfortunately a strong head wind against us. Eventually we arrived and had breakfast, and it was here that we changed planes, from the *Astrae* to the *Hamo*. The new plane was infinitely larger than the other and more comfortable, Captain Spafford was her pilot. There were three other passengers, two males and a female. We flew over the sea to Gwadar, arriving there at 12.20 to refuel. Owing to the strong head wind we were obliged to descend again at Junri

to refuel, and from there a long, long flight to Sharjah where we arrived at 7.50 p.m.

Sharjah could only be described as a vision of the fort in *Beau Geste*. It was grim and weird and unreal. Outside the fort was an armed guard of Arabs in gorgeously coloured robes. The gates clanged behind us after we had entered. The little bedrooms lined the lower walls. In the centre square was a patch of garden, and two little fallow deer followed us about and rubbed their soft noses against our coats. It was a weird sensation sleeping here, with the gruff whispers of the Arabs, and the snuffling of the deer.

We left at dawn. It was very cold and dreary. A flat mist was lying low, like a great white sheet drawn across the sea. We were flying over the Persian Gulf. I had never seen so many sharks or water snakes before. One could not help picturing what a crash would be, and what short work those long black shadows would have made of us. It was with intense relief that we left this shark-ridden sea, and passed over Quator, which was very flat and consisted chiefly of rich gold sand.

We landed at Bahrein at 9.20 where we had breakfast. It was really lovely here—bright sunshine and a fresh breeze. We had breakfast in a small tent—grape nuts, fried fish, kidneys and bacon, and a mushroom omelette; not a bad meal for a tent upon the sands. From Bahrein we went to Al Kuwait, where we arrived at 11.35, and refuelled. Al Kuwait was like a grey pack of cards propped up upon a golden carpet. We shipped the mail and pushed on to Basra. The wind had begun to rise, and the going was bumpy and uncomfortable. We were at Basra at 12.45, where there was a storm. The sand was blowing about into our eyes and down our throats. We left Basra at 6.30 a.m., in a dense fog, but as we neared Bagdad we emerged into blue sky and sunshine. As we passed over Bagdad I longed to stay. It looked romantic and beautiful. The aerodrome was a little away from the city, but over it there was atmosphere and romance. It was like a miniature Croydon, in fact so much like Croydon that it made one's heart leap as one landed.

We left Bagdad in its sunshine and beauty and flew straight into a sandstorm, and I must confess this fifty-mile-an-hour

gale seemed to get me down and I found myself stiff with terror. Our plane felt just like a kite in the air, tossed hither and thither so that we were flung from side to side, and right out of our seats up to the roof. There was sand everywhere—thick, thick as a London fog. The wings of the plane were covered with it. Waves and waves of sand hurled themselves at our machine. The wind played with this four-engined giant as if it were a toy. Were we scared, or were we not? Well, I don't know how the others felt, but I hardly dared draw breath. I watched the face of the pilot. He registered our safety. If he smiled all was well with us, but during this storm his face was very grim. Then, just as my endurance was at an end, Captain Spafford laughed. Oh, it was good, that laugh of his! We all looked at each other and smiled and relaxed. The danger was passed. Little patches of sky emerged out of the sand, sand that was still drifting over 3000 feet up.

It seemed a lifetime before we got to Rutbah at 2.45, and it was here that Captain Spafford informed us the storm was too violent for us to continue on our journey. "We may be able to push on at dawn," he said, "but only if the wind drops, and not unless." It was not until that moment that I realized the endurance and courage and good-nature of the pilot. We six passengers were furious at the delay, and a little unnerved by the howling of the wind, but Captain Spafford turned what might so easily have been a tragic evening into a gay and happy party. We found some darts and a dart-board, and we played a tournament. We found dice and cards. It was almost twelve o'clock before we got to bed. The storm still raged outside, but we were too tired to notice it now.

The next morning we were roused at six o'clock by a sweet little foreign waiter who asked if "my sleepings had been well." He also informed us that the weather had nicely turned.

It was windy. We flew low until we got to the hills. We could see the River Jordan (so disillusioning and disappointing!) flowing sluggishly beneath us. Jericho and Jerusalem were lovelier than the Bible has ever told us, and the Dead Sea could not have had a more appropriate name. Then Garya, where we landed at 10.15 and had



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Planet News

MR. AND MRS. HARRY ROY MEETING ME AT CROYDON AFTER MY
"FLIGHT" FROM SARAWAK

breakfast amongst gorgeous flowers and a perfect sun. We took a lot of photographs of ourselves and then resumed our journey.

We arrived in Cairo at 1.30 and drove by car to a glorious hotel. Here we found a band and Parisian food, and for the first time I began to feel grubby and unsmart. I was a little depressed as well because we had parted from our pilot and our plane. Luckily we had no time to brood ■ we were hustled into a train and on to Alexandria. We arrived at Alexandria at 6.30 and slept the night there. At 6 o'clock we left Alexandria in the flying-boat *Satyrus*, and we were due to arrive at Brindisi at 3.30. We had sausages and bacon on the plane out of a thermos box, and the passage was the prettiest we had yet flown over—Crete—Athens, it all looked superb in the sun, and we had with us for the first time a strong and following wind.

We arrived at Brindisi ■ 3.35, and from there we took the train to Paris—this entailed a train journey of two days. We arrived in Paris at 7 a.m. and at Le Bourget at 9.30, then Croydon at 11.30. Safe and home, just nine days after leaving Singapore.

I have flown to and fro between England and Sarawak three times now, and still I am uncertain how I feel. I love and yet I hate it, I am thrilled at its prospect, and yet I dread its approach. You need health and courage and good nature, because every part of your body and mind are at straining point. And above all you need endurance because the change from the warmth of the East to the cold climate of our English weather is almost more than flesh and blood can stand. It has ■ lure—a fascination beyond description, this playing with death, and as soon as I step out of a plane my one desire is that I shall fly again.

And now I must close the pages of this book, as quietly and kindly as I hope my own life will end. But before I go I would like to thank those men and women who have made my life in Sarawak so complete. Their names are legion,

but as I sit here in my comfortable English chair I can see our Silver Wedding party, and look round the table upon my many friends. And as I raise my glass to them the picture fades, and before my eyes the fifty years of my life parade. First the little plain-faced, morbid child, creeping between the shadows of a country house. And then the girl with an ill-packed suitcase, running, running along a forest path. I hold out my arms, there is one baby, and then a second, and then a third—Hark!—What is that? Is it not wedding bells? Two weddings—two girls, one blonde and one brunette. I turn my head and look into my husband's eyes, and through the blueness of them I see a perfect life, and the picture of a perfect state. Questions have been raised as to what kind of a man this Rajah of mine is—I have tried to answer these questions through the pages of this intimate and detailed book—I have tried to convey what sort of a part my husband has played in this country, so remote and unexplored. I have tried to show that there are no poor, there are no unemployed, there is no cancerous growth that lies in the bosom of almost every country, spreading its disease so that the ravages it has inflicted cannot be concealed. There are no flaws in its government, no blunders in its policy. I have tried to explain the simple Brooke tradition "Sarawak belongs to the Malays, Sea and Land Dyaks, Kayans, Kenyahs, Milanos, Muruts, Kadayans, Bisayahs and other tribes, and not to us. It is for them we labour, not ourselves"—three generations have spoken those words and held to them.

And outside the gates the ogre "Progress" stirs and stretches. "Open up!" he cries. "Open up your country, expand, and let exploiters in." But Vyner looks back upon the toil of those before him. He looks at Sarawak as it is to-day. He looks across at me, and he smiles. The curtain falls—and we sit side by side behind it, waiting—waiting for the last years of our lives to be revealed.

INDEX

A

ALEXANDER, Sir George, 54
 Alexandra, Queen, 47, 153, 154
 Anderson, Sir John, 170
 Argyll, Princess Louise, Duchess
 of, 43
 Arliss, Mr. George, 254, 263
 Ashwell, Miss Lena, 164
 Asquith, Rt. Hon. H. H. (Earl
 of Oxford), 152, 158
 Astaire, Mr. Fred, 251
 Ausnit, Mr. Max, 259



BAKAR, Inchi abu, 174
 Balfour, Rt. Hon. A. J. (1st
 Earl), 26
 Balfour, Rt. Hon. Gerald (2nd
 Earl), 26
 Barrie, Sir J. M., 83, 87 ff.,
 110, 121, 142, 153, 158,
 161, 164, 187, 204-206
 Barron, Dr., 65
 Bates, Joseph, 151
 Battenberg, Prince Alexander of,
 18
 Battenberg, Princess Ena of, 18,
 20, 82
 Battenberg, Prince Henry of, 18,
 43
 Battenberg, Prince Leopold of,
 18

Battenberg, Maurice of, 18
 Beattie, Dr. A. Jordan, 196
Bigamist, The, 238
 Binning, Lord, 53
 Blackwood, Mr. Algernon, 239
 Brand, "Charlie," 35
 Brand, Miss Eva, 35
 Brett, Hon. Dorothy, 14, 21,
 30, 33, 46, 50, 56, 64, 67,
 77-79, 91, 95, 100, 103, 106,
 111 ff., 189, 210
 Brett, Hon. Maurice, 22, 37,
 39, 51, 56, 71, 101, 106,
 137, 151, 194, 198, 209,
 257
 Brett, Hon. Oliver (Viscount
 Esher), 21, 39, 51, 56, 106,
 152, 167 ff., 198
 Brisson, Mr. Carl, 258
 Brooke, Mr. Bertram, 94, 178
 Brooke, Mr. Harry, 93, 105,
 198
 Browne, Mrs. Graham, 264 ff.
 Bryan, Mr., of Sarawak, 202
 Buchanan, Mr. Jack, 250

CALDICOT, Mr., Resident of
 Sarawak, 172, 183
 Caruso, Signor, 81
 Casartelli, Gabrielle, 262
Cauldron, The, 254
 Chaplin, Mr. Charles, 258, 268

Chaplin, Mr. Syd., 258
 Chase, Miss Pauline, 88
 Chong, Ah ("Peter"), 224
 Clare, Miss Mary, 132
 Coffin, Mr. Hayden, 50
 Converse, Miss, 255
 Corbet, Miss Kate, 186
 Corkran, Mrs., 41
 Coward, Mr. Noel, 132, 258
 Coyne, Mr. Joseph, 130
 Craig, Miss Dorothy, 96
 Crerar, Sir James, 35
 Croker, Mr. H. B., 210
 Cunyngname, Mr. P. F., 148
 Cutler, Miss Kate, 262

D

DALTON, Admiral Grant, 221
 Dallas, Mr., 183
 Dare, Miss Phyllis, 86
 Dare, Miss Zena, 86, 137 ff.,
 196, 249, 258
 Dare, Mr. Jack, 245
 Darewski, Mr. Max, 119, 245
 Deshan, Mr., Resident of
 Kuching, 149
 Douglas, Mr., 183
Dream of Iola, 136, 204
 Duke, Miss Ivy, 238

E

EDWARD VII, King, 46
 Edward VIII, King, 40, 43,
 253
 Elsie, Miss Lily, 130
 Esher, William Baliol Brett, first
 Viscount, 31

Esher, Reginald Baliol Brett,
 second Viscount, 24, 41, 56,
 69, 77, 84, 109, 130, 137, 139,
 144, 154, 190, 214

F

FARRER, Miss Gwen, 262
 Fraser, Miss Margaret, 88
 French, Sir John (Earl of Ypres),
 83-86, 110, 129, 141, 188,
 191, 193, 211, 213, 217,
 241, 242, 246 ff.
 Frohman, Mr. Charles, 88 ff.

G

GEORGE V, King, 52, 153, 221
 Germany, ex-Emperor of Ger-
 many, 52
 Gerder, Mr. Mark, 79, 190,
 219
 Gielgud, Mr. John, 132
 Gifford, Mr. Barry, 208, 212,
 216, 246, 253
 Gifford, Mr. G. M., 208
 Gilbey, Sir Walter, 25
 Gould, Mr. Baring-, 172, 183
 Greece, King George of, 255,
 256

H

HAIG, Sir Douglas (Earl), 191,
 213, 242
 Haldane, Lord, 75, 239
 Hamilton, Sir Ian, 142
 Hanton, Dr., of Sarawak, 202

Harcourt, Rt. Hon. Lewis, 27,
142, 161
Harcourt, Sir William, 26, 27
Harvey, Miss, 38
Harvey, Dr. William, 196
Hawtrey, Sir Charles, 136-137,
154

Heels of Pleasure, 262
Hicks, Sir Seymour, 50, 54, 86
Horrocks, Mr. Cyril, 261
Huxley, Mr. Aldous, 210
Huxley, Mr. Julian, 210

I

INCHCAPE, Earl of, 260
Inchcape, Lady (Leonora), 164,
185, 209, 250 ff.
Inchi Mohammed Ali, 230
Irving, Mr. Lawrence, 118

J

JOHNS, Miss Toby, 244

K

KHAN, Prince Aly, 268
Kitchener, Lord, 190

L

LAKING, Mr. Guy, 110
Lawrence, Miss Gertrude, 132
Leno, Dan, 119
Levy, Miss Elsa, 137
Lind, Miss Letty, 50

Loraine, Mr. Robert, 54, 119
Lyons, Sir Joseph, 86

M

MAY, Miss Edna, 131
McCall, Father, 49
Messager, André, 81
Metaxa, Mr. George, 250
Monkbretton, Lord, 35
Montgomery, Rt. Rev. Bishop,
220
Morley, Lord, 126, 129
Morrell, Lady Ottoline, 198,
211, 218
Mortimer, Nurse Marion, 67

N

NAVARRO, Mr. Ramon, 258
Novello, Mr. Ivor, 132, 258

P

Pan and the Little Green Gate,
121
Pearson, Sir Arthur, 86
Persecuted Parents, 263

R

RICKETTS, Mr. F. O., Resident of
Limbang, 148
Rosebery, Lord, 26
Roy, Mr. Harry, 267

Roy, Mrs. Harry (Elizabeth),
185, 209, 250, 261, 266,
271

Royal, H.R.H. the Princess, 40

SARAWAK, Charles Johnson
Brooke, second Rajah of,
125-126, 154, 173, 175 ff.,
184, 201, 219

Sarawak, H.H. Sir Charles Vyner
Brooke, third Rajah of, 94,
97 ff., 112 ff., 134, 140,
145 ff., 178 ff., 219 ff., 231

Sarawak, Ranee Margaret of, 92,
125, 141

Sassoon, Mr. Siegfried, 210

Sawyer, Colonel, 44

Seymour, Mr. Edward ("Teddie"),
27, 55, 64

Shaw, Mr. G. Bernard, 83, 124-
125, 128, 142 ff., 158, 161,
191, 215

Sheridan, Mr. Wilfrid, 56

Silvester, Mr., 244

Slade, Mr., of Sarawak, 202

Soverel, Marquis de, 80

Spafford, Captain, 274

Spain, ex-King Alfonso of, 81

Spender, Mr. Harold, 120

Stocker, Miss Doris, 200

Street with the Seven Houses, 124
127

Sutherland, Millicent, Duchess of,
80, 199

Swee, Mr. Tiang, 223

T

TEMPEST, Miss Marie, 50, 263

Terris, Miss Ellaline, 86

Toys, 207, 238

Trec, Sir Herbert Beerbohm, 131

Trevelyan, Miss Hilda, 88

Treves, Sir Frederick, 66

V

VICTORIA, Queen, 19

W

WARD, Mr. Charles Dudley, 262

Ward, Mrs. Dudley, 34

Waugh, Mr. Alex, 211

Weyer, Sylvan Van de, 151

Wild Orchids, 252

Williamson, Mr. Charles
("Chat"), 48

Wordsworth, Mrs., 18

Y

YORK, The Duke of, 40

Yorke, Lady Susan, 93

Youell, Captain, 271

Young, Sir Arthur, 170

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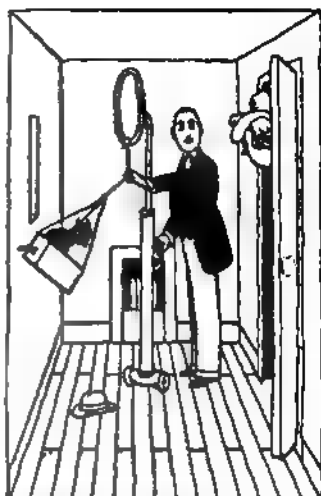
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